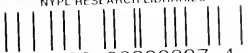
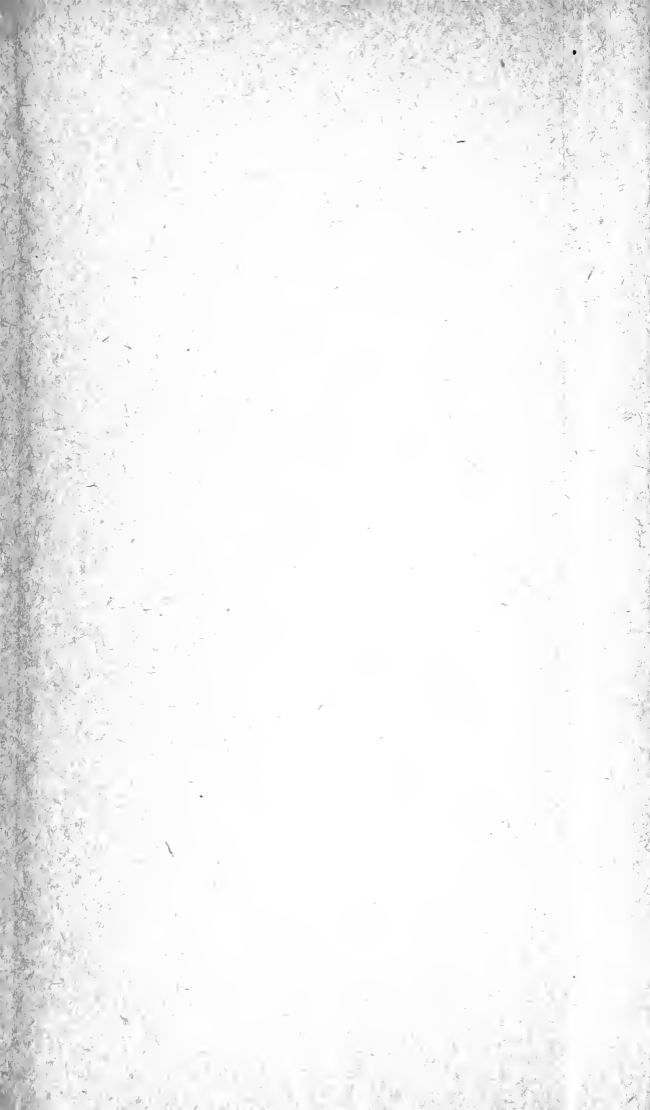


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 08230837 4



5.

Burroughs

BURRUS

AN



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

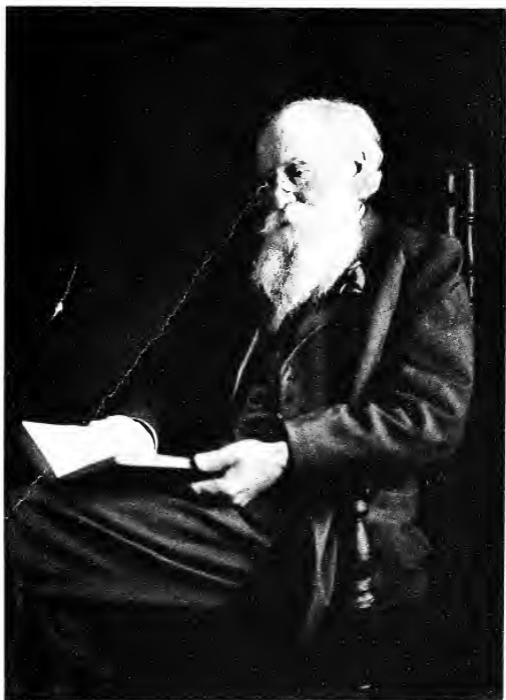


OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS









*John Burroughs*

# OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

BY  
CLARA BARRUS

INCLUDING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES  
BY MR. BURROUGHS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
PHOTOGRAPHS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
The Riverside Press Cambridge

2-114



COPYRIGHT, 1914, BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Published March 1914*

W W Y W O R  
3 L O O N  
Y S A S R U

## CONTENTS

OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS . . . . .	1
THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST . . . . .	19
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES . . . . .	45
ANCESTRY AND FAMILY LIFE . . . . .	46
CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH . . . . .	73
SELF-ANALYSIS . . . . .	109
THE EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS . . . . .	148
A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES . . . . .	184
BACK TO PEPACTON . . . . .	195
CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR . . . . .	227
JOHN BURROUGHS: AN APPRECIATION . . . . .	255
INDEX . . . . .	275

NOV 20 1964  
U.S. DEPT. OF JUSTICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

JOHN BURROUGHS <i>Photogravure</i> . . . . .	. <i>Frontispiece</i>
From a photograph by Theona Peck Harris.	
SLABSIDES . . . . .	6
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.	
RIVERBY FROM THE ORCHARD . . . . .	22
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.	
THE STUDY, RIVERBY . . . . .	24
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.	
BIRTHPLACE OF JOHN BURROUGHS, ROXBURY, NEW YORK . . . . .	60
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.	
THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE, ROXBURY, NEW YORK . . . . .	74
From a photograph by M. H. Fanning.	
ONE OF MR. BURROUGHS'S FAVORITE SEATS, ROXBURY, NEW YORK . . . . .	116
From a photograph by Clifton Johnson.	
THE LIVING-ROOM, SLABSIDES . . . . .	186
From a photograph by M. H. Fanning.	
WOODCHUCK LODGE AND BARN . . . . .	198
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.	
MR. BURROUGHS IN THE HAY-BARN STUDY, WOOD- CHUCK LODGE . . . . .	200
From a photograph by R. J. H. De Loach	

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- CRADLE IN WHICH JOHN BURROUGHS WAS ROCKED . 202**  
From a photograph by Dr. John D. Johnson.
- VIEW OF THE CATSKILLS FROM WOODCHUCK LODGE . 208**  
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.
- LIVING-ROOM, WOODCHUCK LODGE, WITH RUSTIC FURNITURE MADE BY MR. BURROUGHS . . . . 220**  
From a photograph by M. H. Fanning.
- ON THE PORCH AT WOODCHUCK LODGE . . . . 224**  
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.
- JOHN MUIR AND JOHN BURROUGHS, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA . . . . . 238**  
From a photograph by George B. King.
- JOHN BURROUGHS AND JOHN MUIR IN THE YOSEMITE 248**  
From a photograph by F. P. Clatworthy.
- MR. BURROUGHS SITTING FOR A STATUETTE . . . . 258**  
From a photograph by Charles S. Olcott.



**OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS**



## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

**W**E all claim John Burroughs as our friend. He is inextricably blended with our love for the birds and the flowers, and for all out of doors; but he is much more to us than a charming writer of books about nature, and we welcome familiar glimpses of him as one welcomes anything which brings him in closer touch with a friend.

A clever essayist, in speaking of the "obituary method of appreciation," says that we feel a slight sense of impropriety and insecurity in contemporary plaudits. "Wait till he is well dead, and four or five decades of daisies have bloomed over him, says the world; then, if there is any virtue in his works, we will tag and label them and confer immortality upon him." But Mr. Burroughs has not had to wait till the daisies cover him to be appreciated. A multitude of his readers has sought him out and walked amid the daisies with him, listened with him to the birds, and gained countless delightful associations with all these things through this personal relation with the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

author; and these friends in particular will, I trust, welcome some "contemporary plaudits."

As a man, and as a writer, Mr. Burroughs has been in the public eye for many years. At the age of twenty-three he had an article printed in the "Atlantic Monthly," and in 1910 that journal celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his contributions to its columns. Early in his career he received marked recognition from able critics, and gratifying responses from readers. It is rare in the history of an author that his books after fifty years of writing have the freshness, lucidity, and charm that Mr. Burroughs's later books have. A critic in 1876 speaks of his "quiet, believing style, free from passion or the glitter of rhetoric, and giving one the sense of simple eyesight"; and now, concerning one of his later books, "Time and Change," Mr. Brander Matthews writes: "In these pellucid pages — so easy to read because they are the result of hard thinking — he brings home to us what is the real meaning of the discoveries and the theories of the scientists. . . . He brings to bear his searching scientific curiosity and his sympathetic interpreting imagination. . . . All of them models of the essay at its best — easy, unpedantic, and unfailingly interesting."

From school-children all over the United States, from nearly every civilized country on the globe,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

from homes of the humble and of the wealthy, from the scholar in his study, from the clergyman, the lawyer, the physician, the business man, the farmer, the raftsmen, the sportsman, from the invalid shut in from the great outdoors (but, thanks to our friend, not shut *out* from outdoor blessings), have come for many years heartfelt letters attesting the wholesome and widespread influence of his works.

President Roosevelt a few years ago, in dedicating one of his books to "Dear Oom John," voiced the popular feeling: "It is a good thing for our people that you have lived, and surely no man can wish to have more said of him."

Some years ago, the New York "Globe," on announcing a new book by Mr. Burroughs, said, "It has been the lot of few writers of this country or of any country to gain such good will and personal esteem as for many years have been freely given to John Burroughs." If we ask why this is so, we find it answered by Whitman, who, in conversation with a friend, said, "John is one of the true hearts — one of the true hearts — warm, sure, firm."

Mr. Burroughs has been much visited, much "appreciated," much rhymed about, much painted, modeled, and photographed, and — much loved. Because he has been so much loved, and because his influence has been so far-reaching, it has seemed to me that a book which gives familiar and inti-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

mate glimpses of him will be welcomed by the legion who call him friend. The exceptional opportunities I have enjoyed for many years past of observing him encourage me in the undertaking.

The readers of Mr. Burroughs crave the personal relation with him. Just as they want to own his books, instead of merely taking them from the public libraries, so they want to meet the man, take him by the hand, look into his eyes, hear his voice, and learn, if possible, what it is that has given him his unfailing joy in life, his serenity, his comprehensive and loving insight into the life of the universe. They feel, too, a sense of deep gratitude to one who has shown them how divine is the soil under foot — veritable star-dust from the gardens of the Eternal. He has made us feel at one with the whole cosmos, not only with bird and tree, and rock and flower, but also with the elemental forces, the powers which are friendly or unfriendly according as we put ourselves in right or wrong relations with them. He has shown us the divine in the common and the near at hand; that heaven lies about us here in this world; that the glorious and the miraculous are not to be sought afar off, but are here and now; and that love of the earth-mother is, in the truest sense, love of the divine: "The babe in the womb is not nearer its mother than are we to the invisible, sustaining, mothering

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

powers of the universe, and to its spiritual entities, every moment of our lives." One who speaks thus of the things of such import to every human soul is bound to win responses; he deals with things that come home to us all. We want to know him.

Although retiring in habit, naturally seeking seclusion, Mr. Burroughs is not allowed over-indulgence in this tendency. One may with truth describe him as a contemporary described Edward FitzGerald — "an eccentric man of genius who took more pains to avoid fame than others do to seek it." And yet he is no recluse. When disciples seek out the hermit in hiding behind the vines at Slabsides, they find a genial welcome, a simple, homely hospitality; find that the author merits the Indian name given him by a clever friend — "Man-not-afraid-of-company."

The simplicity and gentleness of this author and his strong interest in people endear him to the reader; we feel these qualities in his writings long before meeting him — a certain urbanity, a tolerant insight and sympathy, and a quiet humor. These draw us to him. Perhaps after cherishing his writings for years, cherishing also a confident feeling that we shall know him some day, we obey a sudden impulse, write to him about a bird or a flower, ask help concerning a puzzling natural-history question, tell him what a solace "Waiting"

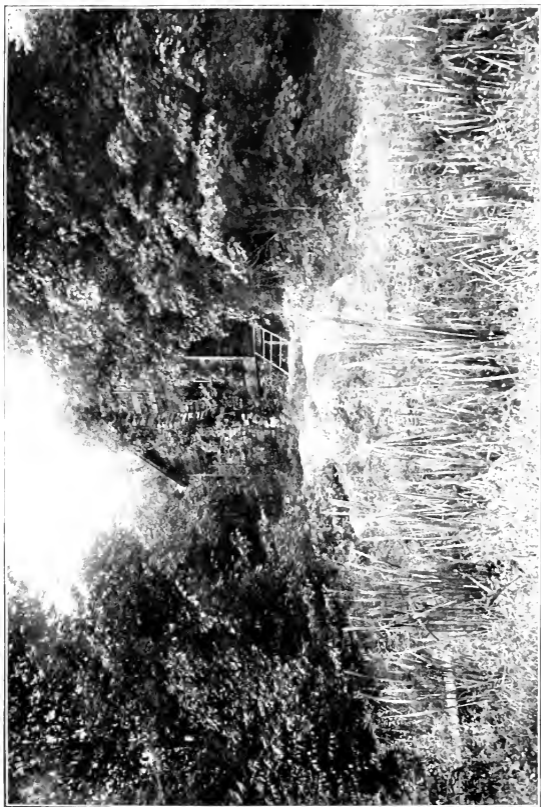
## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

is, what a joy his books have been; possibly we write some verses to him, or express appreciation for an essay that has enlarged our vision and opened up a new world of thought. Perhaps we go to see him at Slabsides, or in the Catskills, as the case may be; perhaps in some unexpected way he comes to us — stops in the same town where we live, visits the college where we are studying, or we encounter him in our travels. In whatever way the personal relation comes about, we, one and all, share this feeling: he is no longer merely the favorite author, he is *our friend* John Burroughs.

I question whether there is any other modern writer so approachable, or one we so desire to approach. He has so written himself into his books that we know him before meeting him; we are charmed with his directness and genuineness, and eager to claim the companionship his pages seem to offer. Because of his own unaffected self, our artificialities drop away when we are with him; we want to be and say and do the genuine, simple thing; to be our best selves; and one who brings out this in us is sure to win our love.

Mr. Burroughs seems to have much in common with Edward FitzGerald; we may say of him as has been said of the translator of the "Rubáiyát": "Perhaps some worship is given him . . . on account of his own refusal of worship for things un-





SLAIDSIDES

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

worthy, or even for things merely conventional." Like FitzGerald, too, our friend is a lover of solitude; like him he shuns cities, gets his exhilaration from the common life about him; is inactive, easy-going, a loiterer and saunterer through life; and could say of himself as FitzGerald said, on describing his own uneventful days in the country: "Such is life, and I believe I have got hold of a good end of it." Another point of resemblance: the American dreamer is like his English brother in his extreme sensitiveness — he cannot bear to inflict or experience pain. "I lack the heroic fibre," he is wont to say. FitzGerald acknowledged this also, and, commenting on his own over-sensitiveness and tendency to melancholy, said, "It is well if the sensibility that makes us fearful of ourselves is diverted to become a case of sympathy and interest with nature and mankind." That this sensibility in Mr. Burroughs has been so diverted, all who are familiar with his widespread influence on our national life and literature will agree.

In a bright descriptive article written a few years ago, Miss Isabel Moore dispels some preconceived and erroneous notions about Mr. Burroughs, and shows him as he is — a man keenly alive to the human nature and life around him. "The boys and girls buzzed about him," she says, "as bees about some peculiarly delectable blossom. He walked

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

with them, talked with them, entranced them . . . the most absolutely human person I have ever met — a born comrade, if there ever was one; in daily life a delightful acquaintance as well as a philosopher and poet and naturalist, and a few other things." She describes him riding with a lot of young people on a billowy load of hay; going to a ball-game, at which no boy there enjoyed the contest more, or was better informed as to the points of the game. "Verily," she says, "he has what Björnson called 'the child in the heart.'"

It is the "child in the heart," and, in a way, the "child" in his books, that accounts for his wide appeal. He often says he can never think of his books as *works*, because so much play went into the making of them. He has gone out of doors in a holiday spirit, has had a good time, has never lost the boy's relish for his outings, and has been so blessed with the gift of expression that his own delight is communicated to his reader.

And always it is the man behind the book that makes the widest appeal. In 1912, a Western architect, in correspondence with the writer concerning recent essays of Mr. Burroughs, said: —

I have had much pleasure and soul-help in reading and re-reading "The Summit of the Years." In this, and in "All's Well with the World," is mirrored the very soul of the gentlest, the most lovable man-character I have

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

ever come across in literature or life. . . . To me all his books, from "Wake-Robin" to "Time and Change," radiate the most joyous optimism. . . . During the past month I have devoted my evenings to re-reading [them]. . . . He has always meant a great deal more to me than merely intellectual pleasure, and, next to Walt Whitman, has helped me to keep my life as nearly open to the influences of outdoors and the stars as may be in a dweller in a large town.

As I write, a letter comes from a Kansas youth, now a graduate student at Yale, expressing the hope that he can see Mr. Burroughs at Slabsides in April: "There is nothing I want to say — but for a while I would like to be near him. He is my great good teacher and friend. . . . As you know, he is more to me than Harvard or Yale. He is the biggest, simplest, and serenest man I have met in all the East."

I suppose there is no literary landmark in America that has had a more far-reaching influence than Slabsides. Flocks of youths and maidens from many schools and colleges have, for the past fifteen years, climbed the hill to the rustic cabin in all the gayety and enthusiasm of their young lives. But they have seen more than the picturesque retreat of a living author; they have received a salutary impression made by the unostentatious life of a man who has made a profound impression on his day

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and age; they have gone their separate ways with an awakened sense of the comradeship it is possible to have with nature, and with an ennobling affection for the one who has made them aware of it. And this affection goes with them to whatever place on the globe their destinies carry them. It is transmitted to their children; it becomes a very real part of their lives.

“My dear John Burroughs — Everybody’s dear John Burroughs,” a friend writes him from London, recounting her amusing experiences in the study of English birds. And it is “Everybody’s dear John Burroughs” who stands in the wide doorway at Slabsides and gives his callers a quiet, cordial welcome. And when the day is ended, and the visitor goes his way down the hill, he carries in his heart a new treasure—the surety that he has found a comrade.

Having had the privilege for the past twelve years of helping Mr. Burroughs with his correspondence, I have been particularly interested in the spontaneous responses which have come to him from his young readers, not only in America, but from Europe, New Zealand, Australia. Confident of his interest, they are boon companions from the start. They describe their own environment, give glimpses of the wild life about them, come to him with their natural-history difficulties; in short,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

write as to a friend of whose tolerant sympathy they feel assured. In fact, this is true of all his correspondents. They get on easy footing at once. They send him birds, flowers, and insects to identify; sometimes live animals and birds — skylarks have been sent from England, which he liberated on the Hudson, hoping to persuade them to become acclimated; “St. John’s Bread,” or locust pods, have come to him from the Holy Land; pressed flowers and ferns from the Himalayas, from Africa, from Haleakala.

Many correspondents are considerate enough not to ask for an answer, realizing the countless demands of this nature made upon a man like Mr. Burroughs; others boldly ask, not only for a reply, but for a photograph, an autograph, his favorite poem written in his own hand, a list of favorite books, his views on capital punishment, on universal peace, on immortality; some naïvely ask for a sketch of his life, or a character sketch of his wife with details of their home life, and how they spend their time; a few modestly hope he will write a poem to them personally, all for their very own. A man of forty-five is tired of the hardware business, lives in the country, sees Mr. Burroughs’s essays in the “Country Calendar,” and asks him to “learn” him to “rite for the press.”

Some readers take him to task for his opinions,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

some point out errors, or too sweeping statements (for he does sometimes make them); occasionally one suggests other topics for him to write about; others labor to bring him back into orthodox paths; hundreds write of what a comfort "Waiting" has been; and there are countless requests for permission to visit Slabsides, as well as invitations to the homes of his readers.

Many send him verses, a few the manuscripts of entire books, asking for criticism. (And when he does give criticism, he gives it "unsweetened," being too honest to praise a thing unless in his eyes it merits praise.) Numerous are the requests that he write introductions to books; that he address certain women's clubs; that he visit a school, or a nature-study club, or go from Dan to Beersheba to hold Burroughs Days — each writer, as a rule, urging his claim as something very special, to which a deaf ear should not be turned. Not all his correspondents are as considerate as the little girl who was especially eager to learn his attitude toward snakes, and who, after writing a pretty letter, ended thus: "Inclosed you will find a stamp, for I know it must be fearfully expensive and inconvenient to be a celebrity."

Occasionally he is a little severe with a correspondent, especially if one makes a preposterous statement, or draws absurd conclusions from faulty



## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

observations. But he is always fair. The following letter explains itself: —

Your first note concerning my cat and hog story made me as mad as a hornet, which my reply showed. Your second note has changed me into a lamb, as nearly as a fellow of seventy-five can become one. . . .

I have read, I think, every book you ever wrote, and do not let any production of yours escape me; and I have a little pile of framed copies of your inimitable "My Own" to diffuse among people at Christmas; and all these your writings make me wonder and shed metaphorical tears to think that you are such a heretic about reason in animals. But even Homer nods; and it is said Roosevelt has moments of silence. S. C. B.

The questions his readers propound are sometimes very amusing. A physician of thirty years' practice asks in all seriousness how often the lions bring forth their young, and whether it is true that there is a relation between the years in which they breed and the increased productivity of human beings. One correspondent begs Mr. Burroughs to tell him how he and his wife and Theodore Roosevelt fold their hands (as though the last-named ever folded his), declaring he can read their characters with surprising accuracy if this information is forthcoming. In this instance, I think, Mr. Burroughs folded his hands serenely, leaving his correspondent waiting for the valued data.

The reader will doubtless be interested to see the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

kind of letter the children sometimes get from their friend. I am fortunate in having one written in 1887 to a rhetoric class in Fulton, New York, and one in 1911, written to children in the New York City schools, both of which I will quote: —

WEST PARK, N. Y., February 21, 1887 ]

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS, —

Your teacher Miss Lawrence has presumed that I might have something to say to a class of boys and girls studying rhetoric, and, what is more, that I might be disposed to say it. What she tells me about your interest in my own writings certainly interests me and makes me wish I might speak a helpful word to you. But let me tell you that very little conscious rhetoric has gone into the composition of those same writings.

Valuable as the study of rhetoric undoubtedly is, it can go but a little way in making you successful writers. I think I have got more help as an author from going a-fishing than from any textbook or classbook I ever looked into. Miss Lawrence will not thank me for encouraging you to play truant, but if you take Bacon's or Emerson's or Arnold's or Cowley's essays with you and dip into them now and then while you are waiting for the fish to bite, she will detect some fresh gleam in your composition when next you hand one in.

There is no way to learn style so sure as by familiarity with nature, and by study of the great authors. Shakespeare can teach you all there is to be learned of the art of expression, and the rhetoric of a live trout leaping and darting with such ease and sureness cannot well be beaten.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

What you really have in your heart, what you are in earnest about, how easy it is to say that!

Miss Lawrence says you admire my essay on the strawberry. Ah! but I loved the strawberry — I loved the fields where it grew, I loved the birds that sang there, and the flowers that bloomed there, and I loved my mother who sent me forth to gather the berries; I loved all the rural sights and sounds, I felt near them, so that when, in after years, I came to write my essay I had only to obey the old adage which sums up all of the advice which can be given in these matters, "Look in thy heart and write."

The same when I wrote about the apple. I had apples in my blood and bones. I had not ripened them in the haymow and bitten them under the seat and behind my slate so many times in school for nothing. Every apple tree I had ever shinned up and dreamed under of a long summer day, while a boy, helped me to write that paper. The whole life on the farm, and love of home and of father and mother, helped me to write it.

In writing your compositions, put your rhetoric behind you and tell what you feel and know, and describe what you have seen.

All writers come sooner or later to see that the great thing is to be simple and direct; only thus can you give a vivid sense of reality, and without a sense of reality the finest writing is mere froth.

Strive to write sincerely, as you speak when mad, or when in love; not with the tips of the fingers of your mind, but with the whole hand.

A noted English historian [Freeman] while visiting Vassar College went in to hear the rhetoric class. After the exercises were over he said to the professor, "Why

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

don't you teach your girls to spin a plain yarn?" I hope Miss Lawrence teaches you to spin a plain yarn. There is nothing like it. The figures of rhetoric are not paper flowers to be sewed upon the texture of your composition; they have no value unless they are real flowers which sprout naturally from your heart.

What force in the reply of that little Parisian girl I knew of! She offered some trinkets for sale to a lady on the street. "How much is this?" asked the lady, taking up some article from the little girl's basket. "Judge for yourself, Madam, I have tasted no food since yesterday morning." Under the pressure of any real feeling, even of hunger, our composition will not lack point.

I might run on in this way another sheet, but I will stop. I have been firing at you in the dark, — a boy or a girl at hand is worth several in the bush, off there in Fulton, — but if any of my words tingle in your ears and set you to thinking, why you have your teacher to thank for it.

Very truly yours,

JOHN BURROUGHS.

LA MANDA PARK, CAL., February 24, 1911'

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS, —

A hint has come to me here in southern California, where I have been spending the winter, that you are planning to celebrate my birthday — my seventy-fourth this time, and would like a word from me. Let me begin by saying that I hope that each one of you will at least reach my age, and be able to spend a winter, or several of them, in southern California, and get as much pleasure

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

out of it as I have. It is a beautiful land, with its leagues of orange groves, its stately plains, its park-like expanses, its bright, clean cities, its picturesque hamlets, and country homes, and all looked down upon by the high, deeply sculptured mountains and snow-capped peaks.

Let me hope also that when you have reached my age you will be as well and as young as I am. I am still a boy at heart, and enjoy almost everything that boys do, except making a racket.

Youth and age have not much to do with years. You are young so long as you keep your interest in things and relish your daily bread. The world is "full of a number of things," and they are all very interesting.

As the years pass I think my interest in this huge globe upon which we live, and in the life which it holds, deepens. An active interest in life keeps the currents going and keeps them clear. Mountain streams are young streams; they sing and sparkle as they go, and our lives may be the same. With me, the secret of my youth in age is the simple life — simple food, sound sleep, the open air, daily work, kind thoughts, love of nature, and joy and contentment in the world in which I live. No excesses, no alcoholic drinks, no tobacco, no tea or coffee, no stimulants stronger than water and food.

I have had a happy life. I have gathered my grapes with the bloom upon them. May you all do the same.

With all good wishes,

JOHN BURROUGHS.

"I have no genius for making gifts," Mr. Burroughs once said to me, but how his works belie his words! In these letters, and in many others which

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS.

his unknown friends have received from him, are gifts of rare worth, while his life itself has been a benefaction to us all.

One day in recounting some of the propitious things which have come to him all unsought, he said: "How fortunate I have always been! My name should have been 'Felix.'" But since "John" means "the gracious gift of God," we are content that he was named John Burroughs.

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

**W**E are coming more and more to like the savor of the wild and the unconventional. Perhaps it is just this savor or suggestion of free fields and woods, both in his life and in his books, that causes so many persons to seek out John Burroughs in his retreat among the trees and rocks on the hills that skirt the western bank of the Hudson. To Mr. Burroughs more perhaps than to any other living American might be applied these words in Genesis: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed" — so redolent of the soil and of the hardiness and plenitude of rural things is the influence that emanates from him. His works are as the raiment of the man, and to them adheres something as racy and wholesome as is yielded by the fertile soil.

We are prone to associate the names of our three most prominent literary naturalists,— Gilbert White, of England, and Thoreau and John Burroughs, of America, — men who have been so *en rapport* with nature that, while ostensibly only disclosing the charms of their mistress, they have at the same time subtly communicated much of their

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

own wide knowledge of nature, and permanently enriched our literature as well.

In thinking of Gilbert White one invariably thinks also of Selborne, his open-air parish; in thinking of Thoreau one as naturally recalls his humble shelter on the banks of Walden Pond; and it is coming to pass that in thinking of John Burroughs one thinks likewise of his hidden farm high on the wooded hills that overlook the Hudson, nearly opposite Poughkeepsie. It is there that he has built himself a picturesque retreat, a rustic house named Slabsides. I find that, to many, the word "Slabsides" gives the impression of a dilapidated, ramshackle kind of place. This impression is an incorrect one. The cabin is a well-built two-story structure, its uneuphonious but fitting name having been given it because its outer walls are formed of bark-covered slabs. "My friends frequently complain," said Mr. Burroughs, "because I have not given my house a prettier name, but this name just expresses the place, and the place just meets the want that I felt for something simple, homely, secluded — something with the bark on."

Both Gilbert White and Thoreau became identified with their respective environments almost to the exclusion of other fields. The minute observations of White, and his records of them, extending over forty years, were almost entirely confined to



## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

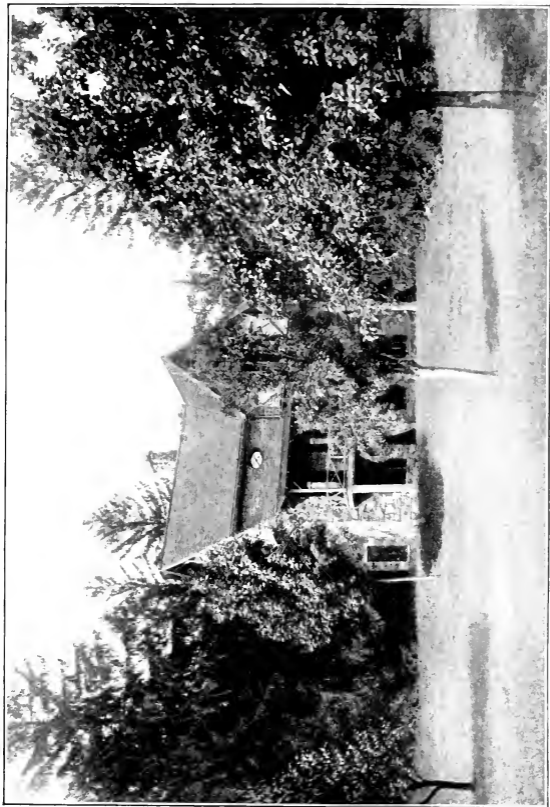
the district of Selborne. He says that he finds that "that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined." The thoroughness with which he examined his own locality is attested by his "Natural History of Selborne." Thoreau was such a stay-at-home that he refused to go to Paris lest he miss something of interest in Concord. "I have traveled a good deal in Concord," he says in his droll way. And one of the most delicious instances of provinciality that I ever came across is Thoreau's remark on returning Dr. Kane's "Arctic Explorations" to a friend who had lent him the book — "Most of the phenomena therein recorded are to be observed about Concord." In thinking of John Burroughs, however, the thought of the author's mountain home as the material and heart of his books does not come so readily to consciousness. For most of us who have felt the charm of his lyrical prose, both in his outdoor books and in his "Indoor Studies," were familiar with him as an author long before we knew there was a Slabsides — long before there was one, in fact, since he has been leading his readers to nature for fifty years, while the picturesque refuge we are now coming to associate with him has been in existence only about fifteen years.

Our poet-naturalist seems to have appropriated all outdoors for his stamping-ground. He has given

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

us in his limpid prose intimate glimpses of the hills and streams and pastoral farms of his native country; has taken us down the Pepacton, the stream of his boyhood; we have traversed with him the "Heart of the Southern Catskills," and the valleys of the Neversink and the Beaverkill; we have sat upon the banks of the Potomac, and sailed down the Saguenay; we have had a glimpse of the Blue Grass region, and "A Taste of Maine Birch" (true, Thoreau gave us this, also, and other "Excursions" as well); we have walked with him the lanes of "Mellow England"; journeyed "In the Carlyle Country"; marveled at the azure glaciers of Alaska; wandered in the perpetual summerland of Jamaica; camped with him and the Strenuous One in the Yellowstone; looked in awe and wonder at that "Divine Abyss," the Grand Cañon of the Colorado; felt the "Spell of Yosemite," and idled with him under the sun-steeped skies of Hawaii and by her morning-glory seas.

Our essayist is thus seen not to be untraveled, yet he is no wanderer. No man ever had the home feeling stronger than has he; none is more completely under the spell of a dear and familiar locality. Somewhere he has said: "Let a man stick his staff into the ground anywhere and say, 'This is home,' and describe things from that point of view, or as they stand related to that spot, — the



RIVERBY FROM THE ORCHARD

THE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

weather, the fauna, the flora,—and his account shall have an interest to us it could not have if not thus located and defined.”

Before hunting out Mr. Burroughs in his mountain hermitage, let us glance at his conventional abode, Riverby, at West Park, Ulster County, New York. This has been his home since 1874. Having chosen this place by the river, he built his house of stone quarried from the neighboring hills, and finished it with the native woods; he planted a vineyard on the sloping hillside, and there he has successfully combined the business of grape-culture with his pursuits and achievements as a literary naturalist. More than half his books have been written since he has dwelt at Riverby, the earlier ones having appeared when he was a clerk in the Treasury Department in Washington, an atmosphere supposedly unfriendly to literary work. It was not until he gave up his work in Washington, and his later position as bank examiner in the eastern part of New York State, that he seemed to come into his own. Business life, he had long known, could never be congenial to him; literary pursuits alone were insufficient; the long line of yeoman ancestry back of him cried out for recognition; he felt the need of closer contact with the soil; of having land to till and cultivate. This need, an ancestral one, was as imperative as his need of

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

literary expression, an individual one. Hear what he says after having ploughed in his new vineyard for the first time: "How I soaked up the sunshine to-day! At night I glowed all over; my whole being had had an earth bath; such a feeling of freshly ploughed land in every cell of my brain. The furrow had struck in; the sunshine had photographed it upon my soul." Later he built him a little study somewhat apart from his dwelling, to which he could retire and muse and write whenever the mood impelled him. This little one-room study, covered with chestnut bark, is on the brow of a hill which slopes toward the river; it commands an extended view of the Hudson. But even this did not meet his requirements. The formality and routine of conventional life palled upon him; the expanse of the Hudson, the noise of railway and steamboat wearied him; he craved something more retired, more primitive, more homely. "You cannot have the same kind of attachment and sympathy for a great river; it does not flow through your affections like a lesser stream," he says, thinking, no doubt, of the trout-brooks that thread his father's farm, of Montgomery Hollow Stream, of the Red Kill, and of others that his boyhood knew. Accordingly he cast about for some sequestered spot in which to make himself a hermitage.

During his excursions in the vicinity of West



THE STUDY, RIVERBY

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS



## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

Park, Mr. Burroughs had lingered oftenest in the hills back of, and parallel with, the Hudson, and here he finally chose the site for his rustic cabin. He had fished and rowed in Black Pond, sat by its falls in the primitive forest, sometimes with a book, sometimes with his son, or with some other hunter or fisher of congenial tastes; and on one memorable day in April, years ago, he had tarried there with Walt Whitman. There, seated on a fallen tree, Whitman wrote this description of the place which was later printed in "Specimen Days": —

<sup>F</sup> I jot this memorandum in a wild scene of woods and hills where we have come to visit a waterfall. I never saw finer or more copious hemlocks, many of them large, some old and hoary. Such a sentiment to them, secretive, shaggy, what I call weather-beaten, and let-alone — a rich underlay of ferns, yew sprouts and mosses, beginning to be spotted with the early summer wild flowers. Enveloping all, the monotone and liquid gurgle from the hoarse, impetuous, copious fall — the greenish-tawny, darkly transparent waters plunging with velocity down the rocks, with patches of milk-white foam — a stream of hurrying amber, thirty feet wide, risen far back in the hills and woods, now rushing with volume — every hundred rods a fall, and sometimes three or four in that distance. A primitive forest, druidical, solitary, and savage — not ten visitors a year — broken rocks everywhere, shade overhead, thick underfoot with leaves — a just palpable wild and delicate aroma.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

“Not ten visitors a year” may have been true when Whitman described the place, but we know it is different now. Troops of Vassar girls come to visit the hermit of Slabsides, and are taken to these falls; nature-lovers, and those who only think themselves nature-lovers, come from far and near; Burroughs clubs, boys’ schools, girls’ schools, pedestrians, cyclists, artists, authors, reporters, poets, — young and old, renowned and obscure, — from April till November seek out this lover of nature, who is a lover of human nature as well, who gives himself and his time generously to those who find him. When the friends of Socrates asked him where they should bury him, he said: “You may bury me if you can *find* me.” Not all who seek John Burroughs really find him; he does not mix well with every newcomer; one must either have something of Mr. Burroughs’s own cast of mind, or else be of a temperament capable of genuine sympathy with him, in order to find the real man. He withdraws into his shell before persons of uncongenial temperament; to such he can never really speak — they see Slabsides, but they don’t see Burroughs. He is, however, never curt or discourteous to any one. Unlike Thoreau, who “put the whole of nature between himself and his fellows,” Mr. Burroughs leads his fellows to nature, although it is sometimes, doubtless, with the feeling that one can

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

lead a horse to water, but can't make him drink; for of all the sightseers that journey to Slabsides there must of necessity be many that "Oh!" and "Ah!" a good deal, but never really get further in their study of nature than that. Still, it can scarcely fail to be salutary even to these to get away from the noise and the strife in city and town, and see how sane, simple, and wholesome life is when lived in a sane and simple and wholesome way. Somehow it helps one to get a clearer sense of the relative value of things, it makes one ashamed of his petty pottering over trifles, to witness this exemplification of the plain living and high thinking which so many preach about, and so few practice.

"The thing which a man's nature calls him to do — what else so well worth doing?" asks this writer. One's first impression after glancing about this well-built cabin, with the necessities of body and soul close at hand, is a vicarious satisfaction that here, at least, is one who has known what he wanted to do and has done it. We are glad that Gilbert White made pastoral calls on his outdoor parishioners, — the birds, the toads, the turtles, the snails, and the earthworms,—although we often wonder if he evinced a like conscientiousness toward his human parishioners; we are glad that Thoreau left the manufacture of lead pencils to become, as Emerson jocosely complained, "the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

leader of a huckleberry party", — glad because these were the things their natures called them to do, and in so doing they best enriched their fellows. They literally went away that 'they might come to us in a closer, truer way than had they tarried in our midst. It must have been in answer to a similar imperative need of his own that John Burroughs chose to hie himself to the secluded yet accessible spot where his mountain cabin is built.

"As the bird feathers her nest with down plucked from her own breast," says Mr. Burroughs in one of his early essays, "so one's spirit must shed itself upon its environment before it can brood and be at all content." Here at Slabsides one feels that its master does brood and is content. It is an ideal location for a man of his temperament; it affords him the peace and seclusion he desires, yet is not so remote that he is shut off from human fellowship. For he is no recluse; his sympathies are broad and deep. Unlike Thoreau, who asserts that "you cannot have a deep sympathy with both man and nature," and that "those qualities that bring you near to the one estrange you from the other," Mr. Burroughs likes his kind; he is doubtless the most accessible of all notable American writers, — a fact which is perhaps a drawback to him in his literary work, his submission to being hunted out often being taken advantage of, no doubt, by persons

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

who are in no real sense nature-lovers, but who go to his retreat merely to see the hermit in hiding there.

After twelve years' acquaintance with his books I yielded to the impulse, often felt before, to tell Mr. Burroughs what a joy his writings had been to me. In answering my letter he said: "The genuine responses that come to an author from his unknown readers, judging from my own experience, are always very welcome. It is no intrusion but rather, an inspiration." A gracious invitation to make him a visit came later.

— The visit was made in the "month of tall weeds," in September, 1901. Arriving at West Park, the little station on the West Shore Railway, I found Mr. Burroughs in waiting. The day was gray and somewhat forbidding; not so the author's greeting; his almost instant recognition and his quiet welcome made me feel that I had always known him. It was like going home to hear him say quietly, "So you are here — really here," as he took my hand. The feeling of comradeship that I had experienced in reading his books was realized in his presence. With market-basket on arm, he started off at a brisk pace along the country road, first looking to see if I was well shod, as he warned me that it was quite a climb to Slabsides.

— His kindly face was framed with snowy hair.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

He was dressed in olive-brown clothes, and "his old experienced coat" blended in color with the tree-trunks and the soil with which one felt sure it had often been in close communion.

We soon left the country road and struck into a woodland path, going up through quiet, cathedral-like woods till we came to an abrupt rocky stairway which my companion climbed with ease and agility despite his five-and-sixty years.

I paused to examine some mushrooms, and, finding a species that I knew to be edible, began nibbling it. "Don't taste that," he said imperatively; but I laughed and nibbled away. With a mingling of anxiety and curiosity he inquired: "Are you sure it's all right? Do you really like them? I never could; they are so uncanny — the gnomes or evil genii or hobgoblins of the vegetable world — I give them a wide berth."

He pointed to a rock in the distance where he said he sometimes sat and sulked. "*You* sulk, and own up to it, too?" I asked. "Yes, and own up to it, too. Why not? Don't you?"

"Are there any bee-trees around here?" I questioned, remembering that in one of his essays he has said: "If you would know the delight of bee-hunting, and how many sweets such a trip yields besides honey, come with me some bright, warm, late September or early October day. It is the golden

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

season of the year, and any errand or pursuit that takes us abroad upon the hills, or by the painted woods and along the amber-colored streams at such a time is enough." Here was a September day if not a bright one, and here were the painted woods, and somehow I felt half aggrieved that he did not immediately propose going in quest of wild honey. Instead he only replied: "I don't know whether there are bee-trees around here now or not. I used to find a good deal of wild honey over at a place that I spoke of casually as Mount Hymettus, and was much surprised later to find they had so put it down on the maps of this region. Wild honey *is* delectable, but I pursued that subject till I sucked it dry. I have n't done much about it these later years." So we are not to gather wild honey, I find; but what of that?—am I not actually walking in the woods with John Burroughs?

Up, up we climb, an ascent of about a mile and a quarter from the railway station. Emerging from the woods, we come rather suddenly upon a reclaimed rock-girt swamp, the most of which is marked off in long green lines of celery. This swamp was formerly a lake-bottom; its rich black soil and three perennial springs near by decided Mr. Burroughs to drain and reclaim the soil and compel it to yield celery and other garden produce.

.. Nestling under gray rocks, on the edge of the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

celery garden, embowered in forest trees, is the vine-covered cabin, Slabsides. What a feeling of peace and aloofness comes over one in looking up at the encircling hills! The few houses scattered about on other rocks are at a just comfortable distance to be neighborly, but not too neighborly. Would one be lonesome here? Aye, lonesome, but —

“Not melancholy, — no, for it is green  
And bright and fertile, furnished in itself  
With the few needful things that life requires;  
In rugged arms how soft it seems to lie,  
How tenderly protected!”

Mr. Burroughs has given to those who contemplate building a house some sound advice in his essay “Roof-Tree.” There he has said that a man makes public proclamation of what are his tastes and his manners, or his want of them, when he builds his house; that if we can only keep our pride and vanity in abeyance and forget that all the world is looking on, we may be reasonably sure of having beautiful houses. Tried by his own test, he has no reason to be ashamed of his taste or his manners when Slabsides is critically examined. Blending with its surroundings, it is coarse, strong, and substantial without; within it is snug and comfortable; its wide door bespeaks hospitality; its low, broad roof, protection and shelter; its capacious hearth, cheer; all its appointments for the bodily



## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

needs express simplicity and frugality; and its books and magazines, and the conversation of the host — are they not there for the needs that bread alone will not supply?

“Mr. Burroughs, why don’t you *paint* things?” asked a little boy of four, who had been spending a happy day at Slabsides, but who, at nightfall, while nestling in the author’s arms, seemed suddenly to realize that this rustic house was very different from anything he had seen before. “I don’t like things painted, my little man; that is just why I came up here — to get away from paint and polish — just as you liked to wear your overalls to-day and play on the grass, instead of keeping on that pretty dress your mother wanted you to keep clean.” “Oh!” said the child in such a knowing tone that one felt he understood. But that is another story.

The time of which I am speaking — that gray September day — what a memorable day it was! How cheery the large, low room looked when the host replenished the smouldering fire! “I sometimes come up here even in winter, build a fire, and stay for an hour or more, with long, sad, sweet thoughts and musings,” he said. He is justly proud of the huge stone fireplace and chimney which he himself helped to construct; he also helped to hew the trees and build the house. “What joy went

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

into the building of this retreat! I never expect to be so well content again." Then, musing, he added: "It is a comfortable, indolent life I lead here; I read a little, write a little, and dream a good deal. Here the sun does not rise so early as it does down at Riverby. 'Tired nature's sweet restorer' is not put to rout so soon by the screaming whistles, the thundering trains, and the necessary rules and regulations of well-ordered domestic machinery. Here I really 'loaf and invite my soul.' Yes, I am often melancholy, and hungry for companionship — not in the summer months, no, but in the quiet evenings before the fire, with only Silly Sally to share my long, long thoughts; she is very attentive, but I doubt if she notices when I sigh. She does n't even heed me when I tell her that ornithology is a first-rate pursuit for men, but a bad one for cats. I suspect that she studies the birds with greater care than I do; for now I can get all I want of a bird and let him remain in the bush, but Silly Sally is a thorough-going ornithologist; she must engage in all the feather-splittings that the ornithologists do, and she is n't satisfied until she has thoroughly dissected and digested her material, and has all the dry bones of the subject laid bare."

We sat before the fire while Mr. Burroughs talked of nature, of books, of men and women whose lives or books, or both, have closely touched

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

his own. He talked chiefly of Emerson and Whitman, the men to whom he seems to owe the most, the two whom most his soul has loved.

“I remember the first time I saw Emerson,” he said musingly; “it was at West Point during the June examinations of the cadets. Emerson had been appointed by President Lincoln as one of the board of visitors. I had been around there in the afternoon, and had been peculiarly interested in a man whose striking face and manner challenged my attention. I did not hear him speak, but watched him going about with a silk hat, much too large, pushed back on his head; his sharp eyes peering into everything, curious about everything. ‘Here,’ said I to myself, ‘is a countryman who has got away from home, and intends to see all that is going on’ — such an alert, interested air! That evening a friend came to me and in a voice full of awe and enthusiasm said, ‘Emerson is in town!’ Then I knew who the alert, sharp-eyed stranger was. We went to the meeting and met our hero, and the next day walked and talked with him. He seemed glad to get away from those old fogies and talk with us young men. I carried his valise to the boat-landing — I was in the seventh heaven of delight.”

“I saw him several years later,” he continued, “soon after ‘Wake-Robin’ was published; he men-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

tioned it and said: 'Capital title, capital!' I don't suppose he had read much besides the title."

"The last time I saw him," he said with a sigh, "was at Holmes's seventieth-birthday breakfast, in Boston. But then his mind was like a splendid bridge with one span missing; he had — what is it you doctors call it? — *aphasia*, yes, that is it — he had to grope for his words. But what a serene, godlike air! He was like a plucked eagle tarrying in the midst of a group of lesser birds. He would sweep the assembly with that searching glance, as much as to say, 'What is all this buzzing and chirping about?' Holmes was as brilliant and scintillating as ever; sparks of wit would greet every newcomer, flying out as the sparks fly from that log. Whittier was there, too, looking nervous and uneasy and very much out of his element. But he stood next to Emerson, prompting his memory and supplying the words his voice refused to utter. When I was presented, Emerson said in a slow, questioning way, 'Burroughs—Burroughs?' 'Why, thee knows *him*,' said Whittier, jogging his memory with some further explanation; but I doubt if he then remembered anything about me."

It was not such a leap from the New England writers to Whitman as one might imagine. Mr. Burroughs spoke of Emerson's prompt and generous indorsement of the first edition of "Leaves of

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

Grass": "I give you joy of your free, brave thought. I have great joy in it." This and much else Emerson had written in a letter to Whitman. "It is the charter of an emperor!" Dana had said when Whitman showed him the letter. The poet's head was undoubtedly a little turned by praise from such a source, and much to Emerson's annoyance, the letter was published in the next edition of the "Leaves." Still Emerson and Whitman remained friends to the last.

"Whitman was a child of the sea," said Mr. Burroughs; "nurtured by the sea, cradled by the sea; he gave one the same sense of invigoration and of illimitableness that we get from the sea. He never looked so much at home as when on the shore — his gray clothes, gray hair, and far-seeing blue-gray eyes blending with the surroundings. And his thoughts — the same broad sweep, the elemental force and grandeur and all-embracingness of the impartial sea!"

"Whitman never hurried," Mr. Burroughs continued; "he always seemed to have infinite time at his disposal." It brought Whitman very near to hear Mr. Burroughs say, "He used to take Sunday breakfasts with us in Washington. Mrs. Burroughs makes capital pancakes, and Walt was very fond of them; but he was always late to breakfast. The coffee would boil over, the griddle would

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

smoke, car after car would go jingling by, and no Walt. Sometimes it got to be a little trying to have domestic arrangements so interfered with; but a car would stop at last, Walt would roll off it, and saunter up to the door — cheery, vigorous, serene, putting every one in good humor. And how he ate! He radiated health and hopefulness. This is what made his work among the sick soldiers in Washington of such inestimable value. Every one that came into personal relations with him felt his rare compelling charm.”

It was all very well, this talk about the poets, but climbing “break-neck stairs” on our way thither had given the guest an appetite, and the host as well; and these appetites had to be appeased by something less transcendental than a feast of reason. Scarcely interrupting his engaging monologue, Mr. Burroughs went about his preparations for dinner, doing things deftly and quietly, all unconscious that there was anything peculiar in this sight to the spectator. Potatoes and onions were brought in with the earth still on them, their bed was made under the ashes, and we sat down to more talk. After a while he took a chicken from the market-basket, spread it on a toaster, and broiled it over the coals; he put the dishes on the hearth to warm, washed the celery, parched some grated corn over the coals while the chicken was broiling,

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

talking the while of Tolstoy and of Maeterlinck, of orioles and vireos, of whatever we happened to touch upon. He avowed that he was envious of Maeterlinck on account of his poetic "Life of the Bee." "I ought to have written that," he said; "I know the bee well enough, but I could never do anything so exquisite."

Parts of Maeterlinck's "Treasures of the Humble," and "Wisdom and Destiny," he "could n't stand." I timorously mentioned his chapter on "Silence."

"'Silence'? Oh, yes; silence is very well — some kinds of it; but *why make such a noise about silence?*" he asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

When the chicken was nearly ready, I moved toward the dining-table, on which some dishes were piled. As though in answer to my thought, he said: —

"Yes, if there's anything you can do there, you may." So I began arranging the table.

"Where are *my* knife and fork?"

"In the cupboard," he answered without ceremony.

We brought the good things from the hearth, hot and delicious, and sat down to a dinner that would have done credit to an Adirondack guide, — and when one has said this, what more need one say?

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

In helping myself to the celery I took an outside piece. Mine host reached over and, putting a big white centre of celery on my plate, said: "What's the use taking the outside of things when one can have the heart?" This is typical of John Burroughs's life as well as his art — he has let extraneous things, conventionalities, and non-essentials go; has gone to the heart of things. It is this that has made his work so vital.

As we arose from the table, I began picking up the dishes.

"You are going to help, are you?"

"Of course," I replied; "where is your dish-cloth?" — a natural question, as any woman will agree, but what a consternation it evoked! A just perceptible delay, a fumbling among pots and pans, and he came toward me with a most apologetic air, and with the sorriest-looking rag I had ever seen — its narrow circumference encircling a very big hole.

"Is *that* the best dish-cloth you have?" I asked.

For answer he held it up in front of his face, but the most of it being hole, it did not hide the eyes that twinkled so merrily that my housewifely reproof was effectually silenced. I took the sorry remnant and began washing the dishes, mentally resolving, and carrying out my resolution the next



## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

day, to send him a respectable dish-cloth. Prosaic, if you will, but does not his own Emerson say something about giving —

“to barrows, trays, and pans,  
Grace and glimmer of romance”?

And what graces a dish-pan better than a clean, whole, self-respecting dish-cloth?

So there we stood, John Burroughs and his humble reader, washing and wiping dishes, and weighing Amiel and Schopenhauer in the balance at the same time; and a very novel and amusing experience it was. Yet it did not seem so strange after all, but almost as though it had happened before. Silly Sally purred beseechingly as she followed her master about the room and out to the wood-pile, reminding him that she liked chicken bones.

While putting the bread in the large tin box that stood on the stair-landing, I had some difficulty with the clasp. “Never mind that,” said Mr. Burroughs, as he scraped the potato skins into the fire; “a Vassar girl sat down on that box last summer, and it’s never been the same since.”

The work finished, there was more talk before the fire. It was here that the author told his guest about Anne Gilchrist, the talented, noble-hearted Englishwoman, whose ready acceptance of Whitman’s message bore fruit in her penetrating crit-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

icism of Whitman, a criticism which stands to-day unrivaled by anything that has been written concerning the Good Gray Poet.

Like most of Mr. Burroughs's readers, I cherish his poem "Waiting," and, like most of them, I told him so on seeing him seated before the fire with folded hands and face serene, a living embodiment of the faith and trust expressed in those familiar lines. It would seem natural that he should write such a poem after the heat of the day, after his ripe experience, after success had come to him; it is the lesson we expect one to learn on reaching his age, and learning how futile is the fret and urge of life, how infinitely better is the attitude of trust that what is our own will gravitate to us in obedience to eternal laws. But I there learned that he had written the poem when a young man, life all before him, his prospects in a dubious and chaotic condition, his aspirations seeming likely to come to naught.

"I have lived to prove it true," he said, — "that which I but vaguely divined when I wrote the lines. Our lives are all so fearfully and wonderfully shot through with the very warp and woof of the universe, past, present, and to come! No doubt at all that our own — that which our souls crave and need — does gravitate toward us, or we toward it. 'Waiting' has been successful," he added,

## THE RETREAT OF A POET-NATURALIST

“not on account of its poetic merit, but for some other merit or quality. It puts in simple and happy form some common religious aspirations, without using the religious jargon. People write me from all parts of the country that they treasure it in their hearts; that it steadies their hand at the helm; that **it** is full of consolation for them. It is because it is poetry allied with religion that it has this effect; poetry alone would not do this; neither would a prose expression of the same religious aspirations do it, for we often outgrow the religious views and feelings of the past. The religious thrill, the sense of the Infinite, the awe and majesty of the universe, are no doubt permanent in the race, but the expression of these feelings in creeds and forms addressed to the understanding, or exposed to the analysis of the understanding, is as transient and flitting as the leaves of the trees. My little poem is vague enough to escape the reason, sincere enough to go to the heart, and poetic enough to stir the imagination.”

The power of accurate observation, of dispassionate analysis, of keen discrimination and insight that we his readers are familiar with in his writings about nature, books, men, and life in general, is here seen to extend to self-analysis as well, — a rare gift; a power that makes his opinions carry conviction. ‘We feel he is not intent on upholding

## 'OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS'

any theory, but only on seeing things as they are, and reporting them as they are.

A steady rain had set in early in the afternoon, effectually drowning my hopes of a longer woodland walk that day, but I was then, and many a time since then have been, well content that it was so. I learned less of woodland lore, but more of the woodland philosopher.

In quiet converse passed the hours of that memorable day in the humble retreat on the wooded hills, —

“Far from the clank of the world,” —

and in the company of the poet-naturalist. So cordial had my host been, so gracious the admission to his home and hospitality, that I left the little refuge with a feeling of enrichment I shall cherish while life lasts. I had sought out a favorite author; I had gained a friend. .

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

[In response to my request, Mr. Burroughs began in 1903 to write for me a series of letters, autobiographical in character. It is from them, for the most part, helped out by interviews to fill in the gaps, that I have compiled this part of the book. The letters were not written continuously; begun in 1903, they suffered a long interruption, were resumed in 1906, again in 1907, and lastly in 1912. The reader will, I trust, pardon any repetition noted, an occasional return to a subject previously touched upon being unavoidable because of the long intervals between some of the letters.

It seems to me that these letters picture our author more faithfully than could any portrait drawn by another. Thomas Bailey Aldrich has said that no man has ever yet succeeded in painting an honest portrait of himself in an autobiography, however sedulously he may have set about it; that in spite of his candid purpose he omits necessary touches and adds superfluous ones; that at times he cannot help draping his thought, and that, of course, the least shred of drapery is a disguise. But, Aldrich to the contrary notwithstanding, I believe Mr. Burroughs has pictured himself and his environment in these pages with the same fidelity with which he has interpreted nature. He is so used to "straight seeing and straight thinking" that these gifts do not desert him when his observation is turned upon himself. He seems to be a shining example of the exception that proves

## OUR FRIEND JOHN, BURROUGHS

the rule. Besides, when Aldrich pronounced that dictum, Mr. Burroughs had not produced these sketches.

This record was not written with the intention of its being published as it stood, but merely to acquaint me with the facts and with the author's feelings concerning them, in case I should some day undertake his biography. But it seems to me that just because it was so written, it has a value which would be considerably lessened were it to be worked over into a more finished form. I have been willing to sacrifice the more purely literary value which would undoubtedly grace the record, were the author to revise it, that I may retain its homely, unstudied human value.

I have arranged the autobiographical material under three headings: Ancestry and Family Life, Childhood and Youth, and Self-Analysis. — C. B.]

### ANCESTRY AND FAMILY LIFE

**I** AM, as you know, the son of a farmer. My father was the son of a farmer, as was his father, and his. There is no break, so far as I know, in the line of farmers back into the seventeenth century. There was a Rev. George Burroughs who was hanged (in 1692) for a witch in Salem. He was a Harvard graduate. I know of no other Harvard graduate by our name until Julian [Mr. Burroughs's son] graduated in 1901 from Harvard. My father's cousin, the Rev. John C. Burroughs, the first president of Chicago University, was graduated from Yale sometime in the early forties.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

The first John Burroughs of whom I have any trace came from the West Indies, and settled in Stratford, Connecticut, where he married in 1694. He had ten children, of whom the seventh was John, born in August, 1705. My descent does not come from this John, but from his eldest brother, Stephen, who was born at Stratford in February, 1695. Stephen had eight children, and here another John turns up — his last child, born in 1745. His third child, Stephen Burroughs (born in 1729), was a shipbuilder and became a noted mathematician and astronomer, and lived at Bridgeport, Connecticut. My descent is through Stephen's seventh child, Ephraim, born in 1740.

Ephraim, my great-grandfather, also had a large family, six sons and several daughters, of which my grandfather Eden was one. He was born in Stratford, about 1770. My great-grandfather Ephraim left Stratford near the beginning of the Revolution and came into New York State, first into Dutchess County, when Grandfather was a small boy, and finally settled in what is now the town of Stamford, Delaware County, where he died in 1818. He is buried in a field between Hobart and Stamford.

My grandfather Eden married Rachael Avery, and shortly afterward moved over the mountain to the town of Roxbury, cutting a road through the woods and bringing his wife and all their goods and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

chattels on a sled drawn by a yoke of oxen. This must have been not far from the year 1795. He cleared the land and built a log house with a black-ash bark roof, and a great stone chimney, and a floor of hewn logs. Grandmother said it was the happiest day of her life when she found herself the mistress of this little house in the woods. Great-grandmother Avery lived with them later. She had a petulant disposition. One day when reproved for something, she went off and hid herself in the bushes and sulked — a family trait; I'm a little that way, I guess.

Grandfather Burroughs was religious, — an Old-School Baptist, — a thoughtful, quiet, exemplary man who read his Bible much. He was of spare build, serious, thrifty after the manner of pioneers, and a kind husband and father. He died, probably of apoplexy, when I was four years old. I can dimly remember him. He was about seventy-two.

Grandmother Burroughs had sandy hair and a freckled face, and from her my father and his sister Abby got their red hair. From this source I doubtless get some of my Celtic blood. Grandmother Burroughs had nine children; the earliest ones died in infancy; their graves are on the hill in the old burying-ground. Two boys and five girls survived — Phoebe, Betsy, Mary, Abby, Olly, Chauncey (my father), and Hiram.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

I do not remember Grandmother at all. She died, I think, in 1838, of consumption; she was in the seventies. Father said her last words were, "Chauncey, I have but a little while to live." Her daughter Olly and also my sister Olly died of consumption. Grandmother used to work with Grandfather in the fields, and help make sugar. I have heard them tell how in 1812 they raised wheat which sold for \$2.50 a bushel — a great thing.

Father told me of his uncle, Chauncey Avery, brother of Grandmother Burroughs, who, with his wife and seven children, was drowned near Shandaken, by a flood in the Esopus Creek, in April, 1814, or 1816. The creek rose rapidly in the night; retreat was cut off in the morning. They got on the roof and held family prayers. Uncle Chauncey tried to fell a tree and make a bridge, but the water drove him away. The house was finally carried away with most of the family in it. The father swam to a stump with one boy on his back and stood there till the water carried away the stump, then tried to swim with the boy for shore, but the driftwood soon engulfed him and all was over. Two of the bodies were never found. Their bones doubtless rest somewhere in the still waters of the lower Esopus.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

[Here follow details concerning one paternal and one maternal aunt, which, though picturesque, would better be omitted. It is to be noted, however, that in this simple homely narrative of his ancestors (which, by the way, gives a vivid picture of the early pioneer days) and later in his own personal history, there is no attempt to conceal or gloss over weaknesses or shortcomings; all is set down with engaging candor. — C. B.]

Father's sister Abby married a maternal cousin, John Kelly. He was of a scholarly turn. He worked for Father the year I was born, and I was named after him. I visited him in Pennsylvania in 1873, and while there, when he was talking with me about the men of our family named John Burroughs, he said, "One was a minister in the West, one was Uncle Hiram's son, you are the third, and there is still another I have heard of,—a writer." And I was silly enough not to tell him that I was that one. After I reached home, some of my people sent him "Winter Sunshine," and when he found that I was its author, he wrote that he "set great store by it." I don't know why I should have been so reticent about my books—they were a foreign thing, I suppose; it was not natural to speak of them among my kinsfolk.

[In this connection let me quote from an early letter of Mr. Burroughs to me. It was written in 1901 after the death of his favorite sister: "She was very dear to me,

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

and I had no better friend. More than the rest of my people she aspired to understand and appreciate me, and with a measure of success. My family are plain, unlettered farmer folk, and the world in which you and I live is a sealed book to them. They have never read my books. What they value in me is what I have in common with them, which is, no doubt, the larger part of me. But I love them all just the same. They are a part of father and mother, of the old home, and of my youthful days." — C. B.]

Mother's father, Grandfather Kelly, was a soldier of 1776, of Irish descent, born in Connecticut, I think. His name was Edmund Kelly. He went into the war as a boy and saw Washington and La Fayette. He was at Valley Forge during that terrible winter the army spent there. One day Washington gave the order to the soldiers to dress-parade for inspection; some had good clothes, some scarcely any, and no shoes. He made all the well-dressed men go and cut wood for the rest, and excused the others.

Grandfather was a small man with a big head and quite pronounced Irish features. He was a dreamer. He was not a good provider; Grandmother did most of the providing. He wore a military coat with brass buttons, and red-top boots. He believed in spooks and witches, and used to tell us spook stories till our hair would stand on end.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

He was an expert trout fisherman. Early in the morning I would dig worms for bait, and we would go fishing over in West Settlement, or in Montgomery Hollow. I went fishing with him when he was past eighty. He would steal along the streams and “snake” out the trout, walking as briskly as I do now. From him I get my dreamy, lazy, shirking ways.

In 1848 he and Grandmother came to live near us. He had a severe fit of illness that year. I remember we caught a fat coon for him. He was fond of game. I was there one morning when they entertained a colored minister overnight, probably a fugitive slave. He prayed — how lustily he prayed!

I have heard Grandfather tell how, when he was a boy in Connecticut, he once put his hand in a bluebird’s nest and felt, as he said, “something comical”; he drew out his hand, which was followed by the head and neck of a black snake; he took to his heels, and the black snake after him. (I rather think that’s a myth.) He said his uncle, who was ploughing, came after the black snake with a whip, and the snake slunk away. He thought he remembered that. It may be a black snake might pursue one, but I doubt it.

[Mr. Burroughs’s ingrained tendency to question reports of improbable things in nature shows even in these reminiscences of his grandfather. His instinct for the truth is always on the *qui vive*. — C. B.]

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Grandmother Kelly lived to be past eighty. She was a big woman — thrifty and domestic — big enough to take “Granter” up in her arms and walk off with him. She did more to bring up her family than he did; was a practical housewife, and prolific. She had ten children and made every one of them toe the mark. I don’t know whether she ever took “Granter” across her knee or not, but he probably deserved it. She was quite uneducated. Her maiden name was Lavinia Minot. I don’t know where her people came from, or whether she had any brothers and sisters. They lived in Red Kill mostly, in the eastern part of the town of Roxbury, and also over on the edge of Greene County. I remember, when Grandfather used to tell stories of cruelty in the army, and of the hardships of the soldiers, she would wriggle and get very angry. All her children were large. They were as follows: Sukie, Ezekiel, Charles, Martin, Edmund, William, Thomas, Hannah, Abby, and Amy (my mother). Aunt Sukie was a short, chubby woman, always laughing. Uncle Charles was a man of strong Irish features, like Grandfather. He was a farmer who lived in Genesee County. Uncle Martin was a farmer of fair intelligence; Ezekiel was lower in the scale than the others; was intemperate, and after losing his farm became a day-laborer. He would carry a gin-bottle into the fields, and would mow

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the stones as readily as he would the grass — and I had to turn the grindstone to sharpen his scythe. Uncle Edmund was a farmer and a pettifogger. Uncle William died comparatively young; he had nurseries near Rochester. Uncle Thomas was a farmer, slow and canny, with a quiet, dry humor. Aunt Hannah married Robert Avery, who drank a good deal; I can't remember anything about her. Aunt Abby was large and thrifty; she married John Jenkins, and had a large family. . . . Amy, my mother, was her mother's tenth child.

Mother was born in Rensselaer County near Albany, in 1808. Her father moved to Delaware County when she was a child, driving there with an ox-team. Mother "worked out" in her early teens. She was seventeen or eighteen when she married, February, 1827.

Father and Mother first went to keeping house on Grandfather Burroughs's old place — not in the log house, but in the frame house of which you saw the foundations. Brother Hiram was born there.

[Mr. Burroughs's last walk with his father was to the crumbling foundations of this house. I have heard him tell how his father stood and pointed out the location of the various rooms — the room where they slept the first night they went there; the one where the eldest child was born; that in which his mother died. I stood (one August day in 1902) with Mr. Burroughs on the

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

still remaining joists of his grandfather's house — grass-grown, and with the débris of stones and beams mingling with weeds and bushes. He pointed out to me, as his father had done for him, the location of the various rooms, and mused upon the scenes enacted there; he showed where the paths led to the barn and to the spring, and seemed to take a melancholy interest in picturing the lives of his parents and grandparents. A sudden burst of gladness from a song sparrow, and his musings gave way to attentive pleasure, and the sunlit Present claimed him instead of the shadowy Past. He was soon rejoicing in the discovery of a junco's nest near the foundations of the old house. — C. B.]

My father, Chauncey Burroughs, was born December 20, 1803. He received a fair schooling for those times — the three R's — and taught school one or two winters. His reading was the Bible and hymn-book, his weekly secular paper, and a monthly religious paper.

He used to say that as a boy he was a very mean one, saucy, quarrelsome, and wicked, liked horse-racing and card-playing — both alike disreputable in those times. In early manhood he “experienced religion” and joined the Old-School Baptist Church, of which his parents were members, and then all his bad habits seem to have been discarded. He stopped swearing and Sabbath-breaking, and other forms of wickedness, and became an exemplary member of the community. He was a man of unimpeachable

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

veracity; bigoted and intolerant in his religious and political views, but a good neighbor, a kind father, a worthy citizen, a fond husband, and a consistent member of his church. He improved his farm, paid his debts, and kept his faith. He had no sentiment about things and was quite unconscious of the beauties of nature over which we make such an ado. "The primrose by the river's brim" would not have been seen by him at all. This is true of most farmers; the plough and the hoe and the scythe do not develop their æsthetic sensibilities; then, too, in the old religious view the beauties of this world were vain and foolish.

I have said that my father had strong religious feeling. He took "The Signs of the Times" for over forty years, reading all those experiences with the deepest emotion. I remember when a mere lad hearing him pray in the hog-pen. It was a time of unusual religious excitement with him, no doubt; I heard, and ran away, knowing it was not for me to hear.

Father had red hair, and a ruddy, freckled face. He was tender-hearted and tearful, but with blustering ways and a harsh, strident voice. Easily moved to emotion, he was as transparent as a child, with a child's lack of self-consciousness. Unsophisticated, he had no art to conceal anything, no guile, and, as Mother used to say, no manners. "All



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

I ever had," Father would rejoin, "for I've never used any of them." I doubt if he ever said "Thank you" in his life; I certainly never heard him. He had nothing to conceal, and could not understand that others might have. I have heard him ask people what certain things cost, men their politics, women their ages, with the utmost ingenuousness. One day when he and I were in Poughkeepsie, we met a strange lad on the street with very red hair, and Father said to him, "I can remember when my hair was as red as yours." The boy stared at him and passed on.

Although Father lacked delicacy, he did not lack candor or directness. He would tell a joke on himself with the same glee that he would on any one else. . . . I have heard him tell how, in 1844, at the time of the "anti-renters," when he saw the posse coming, he ran over the hill to Uncle Daniel's and crawled under the bed, but left his feet sticking out, and there they found him. He had not offended, or dressed as an Indian, but had sympathized with the offenders.

He made a great deal of noise about the farm, sending his voice over the hills (we could hear him calling us to dinner when we were working on the "Rundle Place," half a mile away), shouting at the cows, the pigs, the sheep, or calling the dog, with needless expenditure of vocal power at all times

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and seasons. The neighbors knew when Father was at home; so did the cattle in the remotest field. His bark was always to be dreaded more than his bite. His threats of punishment were loud and severe, but the punishment rarely came. Never but once did he take a gad to me, and then the sound was more than the substance. I deserved more than I got: I had let a cow run through the tall grass in the meadow when I might easily have "headed her off," as I was told to do. Father used to say "No," to our requests for favors (such as a day off to go fishing or hunting) with strong emphasis, and then yield to our persistent coaxing.

One day I was going to town and asked him for money to buy an algebra. "What is an algebra?" He had never heard of an algebra, and could n't see why I needed one; he refused the money, though I coaxed and Mother pleaded with him. I had left the house and had got as far as the big hill up there by the pennyroyal rock, when he halloed to me that I might get the algebra — Mother had evidently been instrumental in bringing him to terms. But my blood was up by this time, and as I trudged along to the village I determined to wait until I could earn the money myself for the algebra, and some other books I coveted. I boiled sap and made maple-sugar, and the books were all the sweeter by reason of the maple-sugar money.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

When I wanted help, as I did two or three times later, on a pinch, Father refused me; and, as it turned out, I was the only one of his children that could or would help him when the pinch came — a curious retribution, but one that gave me pleasure and him no pain. I was better unhelped, as it proved, and better for all I could help him. But he was a loving father all the same. He could n't understand my needs, but love outweighs understanding.

He did not like my tendency to books; he was afraid, as I learned later, that I would become a Methodist minister — his pet aversion. He never had much faith in me — less than in any of his children; he doubted if I would ever amount to anything. He saw that I was an odd one, and had tendencies and tastes that he did not sympathize with. He never alluded to my literary work; apparently left it out of his estimate of me. My aims and aspirations were a sealed book to him, as his peculiar religious experiences were to me, yet I reckon it was the same leaven working in us both.

I remember, on my return from Dr. Holmes's seventieth birthday breakfast, in 1879, a remark of father's. He had overheard me telling sister Abigail about the breakfast, and he declared: "I had rather go to hear old Elder Jim Mead preach two hours, if he was living, than attend all the fancy

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

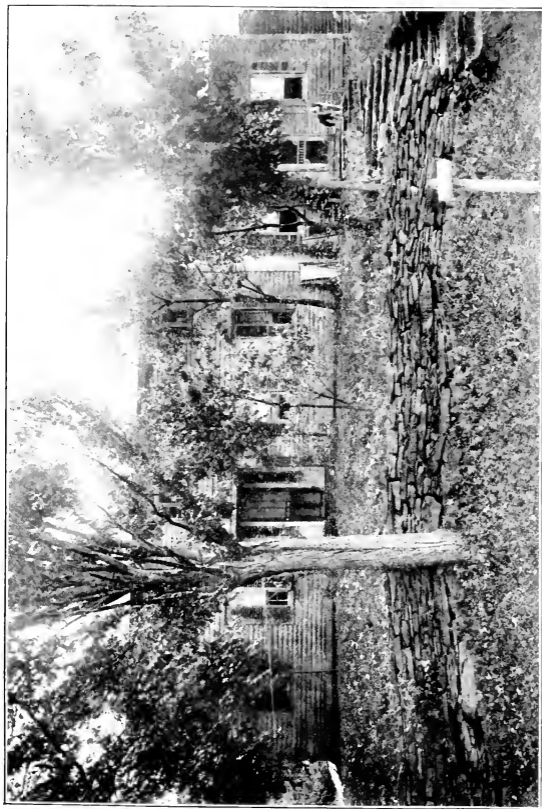
parties in the world." He said he had heard him preach when he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body. The elder undoubtedly had a strong natural eloquence.

Although Father never spoke to me of my writings, Abigail once told me that when she showed him a magazine with some article of mine in, and accompanied by a photograph of me, he looked at it a long time; he said nothing, but his eyes filled with tears.

He went to school to the father of Jay Gould, John Gould — the first child born in the town of Roxbury (about 1780 or 1790).

He married Amy Kelly, my mother, in 1827. He was six years her senior. She lived over in Red Kill where he had taught school, and was one of his pupils. I have often heard him say: "I rode your Uncle Martin's old sorrel mare over to her folks' when I went courting her." When he would be affectionate toward her before others, Mother would say, "Now, Chauncey, don't be foolish."

Father bought the farm of 'Riah Bartram's mother, and moved on it in 1827. In a house that stood where the Old Home does now, I was born, April 3, 1837. It was a frame house with three or four rooms below and one room "done off" above, and a big chamber. I was the fifth son and the seventh child of my parents.



BIRTHPLACE OF JOHN FURROUGHS, ROXBURY, N.Y.

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Mother was in her twenty-ninth year when she was carrying me. She had already borne four boys and two girls; her health was good and her life, like that of all farmers' wives in that section, was a laborious one. I can see her going about her work — milking, butter-making, washing, cooking, berry-picking, sugar-making, sewing, knitting, mending, and the thousand duties that fell to her lot and filled her days. Both she and Father were up at daylight in summer, and before daylight in winter. Sometimes she had help in the kitchen, but oftener she did not. The work that housewives did in those times seems incredible. They made their own soap, sugar, cheese, dipped or moulded their candles, spun the flax and wool and wove it into cloth, made carpets, knit the socks and mittens and "comforts" for the family, dried apples, pumpkins, and berries, and made the preserves and pickles for home use.

Mother went about all these duties with cheerfulness and alacrity. She more than kept up her end of the farm work. She was more strenuous than father. How many hours she sat up mending and patching our clothes, while we were sleeping! Rainy days meant no let-up in her work, as they did in Father's.

The first suit of clothes I remember having, she cut and made. Then the quilts and coverlids she pieced and quilted! We used, too, in my boyhood

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

to make over two tons of butter annually, the care of which devolved mainly upon her, from the skimming of the pans to the packing of the butter in the tubs and firkins, though the churning was commonly done by a sheep or a dog. We made our own cheese, also. As a boy I used to help do the wheying, and I took toll out of the sweet curd. One morning I ate so much of the curd that I was completely cloyed, and could eat none after that.

I can remember Mother's loom pounding away hour after hour in the chamber of an outbuilding where she was weaving a carpet, or cloth. I used to help do some of the quilling — running the yarn or linen thread upon spools to be used in the shuttles. The distaff, the quill-wheel, the spinning-wheel, the reel, were very familiar to me as a boy; so was the crackle, the swingle, the hetchel, for Father grew flax which Mother spun into thread and wove into cloth for our shirts and summer trousers, and for towels and sheets. Wearing those shirts, when new, made a boy's skin pretty red. I dare say they were quite equal to a hair shirt to do penance in; and wiping on a new home-made linen towel suggested wiping on a brier bush. Dear me! how long it has been since I have seen any tow, or heard a loom or a spinning-wheel, or seen a boy breaking in his new flax-made shirt! No one sees these things any more.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Mother had but little schooling; she learned to read, but not to write or cipher; hence, books and such interests took none of her time. She was one of those uneducated countrywomen of strong natural traits and wholesome instincts, devoted to her children; she bore ten, and nursed them all — an heroic worker, a helpful neighbor, and a provident housewife, with the virtues that belonged to so many farmers' wives in those days, and which we are all glad to be able to enumerate in our mothers.

She had not a large frame, but was stout; had brown hair and blue eyes, a fine strong brow, and a straight nose with a strong bridge to it. She was a woman of great emotional capacity, who felt more than she thought. She scolded a good deal, but was not especially quick-tempered. She was an Old-School Baptist, as was Father.

She was not of a vivacious or sunny disposition — always a little in shadow, as it seems to me now, given to brooding and to dwelling upon the more serious aspects of life. How little she knew of all that has been done and thought in the world! and yet the burden of it all was, in a way, laid upon her. The seriousness of Revolutionary times, out of which came her father and mother, was no doubt reflected in her own serious disposition. As I have said, her happiness was always shaded, never in a strong light; and the sadness which motherhood,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and the care of a large family, and a yearning heart beget was upon her. I see myself in her perpetually. A longing which nothing can satisfy I share with her. Whatever is most valuable in my books comes from her — the background of feeling, of pity, of love comes from her.

She was of a very different temperament from Father — much more self-conscious, of a more brooding, inarticulate nature. She was richly endowed with all the womanly instincts and affections. She had a decided preference for Abigail and me among her children, wanted me to go to school, and was always interceding with Father to get me books. She never read one of my books. She died in 1880, at the age of seventy-three. I had published four of my books then.

She had had a stroke of apoplexy in the fall of 1879, but lived till December of the following year, dying on father's seventy-seventh birthday. (He lived four years more.) We could understand but little of what she said after she was taken ill. She used to repeat a line from an old hymn — "Only a veil between."

She thought a good deal of some verses I wrote — "My Brother's Farm" — and had them framed. (You have seen them in the parlor at the Old Home. I wrote them in Washington the fall that you were born. I was sick and forlorn at the time.)

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

I owe to Mother my temperament, my love of nature, my brooding, introspective habit of mind — all those things which in a literary man help to give atmosphere to his work. In her line were dreamers and fishermen and hunters. One of her uncles lived alone in a little house in the woods. His hut was doubtless the original Slabsides. Grandfather Kelly was a lover of solitude, as all dreamers are, and Mother's happiest days, I think, were those spent in the fields after berries. The Celtic element, which I get mostly from her side, has no doubt played an important part in my life. My idealism, my romantic tendencies, are largely her gift.

On my father's side I find no fishermen or hermits or dreamers. I find a marked religious strain, more active and outspoken than on Mother's. The religion of the Kellys was, for the most part, of the silent, meditative kind, but there are preachers and teachers and scholars on Father's side — one of them, Stephen Burroughs (b. 1765), a renegade preacher. Doubtless most of my own intellectual impetus comes from this side of the family. There are also cousins and second cousins on this side who became preachers, and some who became physicians, but I recall none on the Kelly side.

In size and physical make-up I am much like my father. I have my father's foot, and I detect many

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

of his ways in my own. My loud and harmless barking, when I am angered, I get from him. The Kellys are more apt to bite. I see myself, too, in my brothers, in their looks and especially in their weaknesses. Take from me my special intellectual equipment, and I am in all else one of them.

[Speaking of their characteristics as a family, Mr. Burroughs says that they have absolute inability to harbor resentment (a Celtic trait); that they never have "cheek" to ask enough for what they have to sell, lack decision, and are easily turned from their purpose. Commenting on this, he has often said: "We are weak as men — do not make ourselves felt in the community. But this very weakness is a help to me as a writer upon Nature. I don't stand in my own light. I get very close to bird and beast. My thin skin lets the shy and delicate influences pass. I can surrender myself to Nature without effort. I am like her. . . . That which hinders me with men, makes me strong with impersonal Nature, and admits me to her influences. . . . I am lacking in moral fibre, but am tender and sympathetic."]

To see Mr. Burroughs stand and fondly gaze upon the fruitful, well-cultivated fields that his father had cared for so many years, to hear him say that the hills are like father and mother to him, was to realize how strong is the filial instinct in him — that and the home feeling. As he stood on the crest of the big hill by the pennyroyal rock, looking down on the peaceful homestead in the

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

soft light of a midsummer afternoon, his eye roamed fondly over the scene: —

“How fertile and fruitful it is now, but how lonely and bleak the old place looked in that winter landscape the night I drove up from the station in the moonlight after hearing of Father’s death! There was a light in the window, but I knew Father would not meet me at the door this time — beleaguering winter without, and Death within!

“Father and Mother! I think of them with inexpressible love and yearning, wrapped in their last eternal sleep. They had, for them, the true religion, the religion of serious, simple, hard-working, God-fearing lives. To believe as they did, to sit in their pews, is impossible to me — the Time-Spirit has decreed otherwise; but all I am or can be or achieve is to emulate their virtues — my soul can be saved only by a like truthfulness and sincerity.”

The following data concerning his brothers and sisters were given me by Mr. Burroughs in conversation: —

Hiram, born in 1827, was an unpractical man and a dreamer; he was a bee-keeper. He showed great aptitude in the use of tools, could make axe-handles, neck-yokes, and the various things used about the farm, and was especially skilled in building stone walls. But he could not elbow his way in a crowd, could not make farming pay, and was always pushed to the wall. He cared nothing for books, and although he studied grammar when a boy, and could parse, he never could write a grammatical sentence. He died at the age of seventy-five.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

Olly Ann was about two years younger than Hiram. Mr. Burroughs remembers her as a frail, pretty girl, with dark-brown eyes, a high forehead, and a wasp-like waist. She had a fair education for her time, married and had two children, and died in early womanhood of phthisis.

Wilson was a farmer, thrifty and economical. He married but had no children. He was evidently somewhat neurotic; as a child, even when well, he would groan and moan in his sleep, and he died, at the age of twenty-eight, after a short illness, of a delirious fever.

Curtis also was a farmer, but lacked judgment; could not look ahead; thought if he gave his note a debt was canceled, and went on piling up other indebtedness. He had a very meagre schooling, but was apt at witty remarks. He was temperate; was much given to reading "The Signs of the Times," like his father before him. He married and had five children. For many years previous to his death he lived at the homestead, dying there in his eightieth year, in the summer of 1912. Two of his unmarried children still live at the Old Home, — of all places on the earth the one toward which Mr. Burroughs turns with the most yearning fondness.

Edmund died in infancy.

Jane, a tender-hearted, old-fashioned woman, who cried and fretted easily, and worried over trifles, was a good housekeeper, and a fond mother — a fat, dumpy little woman with a doleful voice. She was always urging her brother not to puzzle his head about writing; writing and thinking, she said, were "bad for the head." When he would go away on a journey of only a hundred miles, she would worry incessantly lest something hap-

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

pen to him. She married and had five daughters. Her death occurred in May, 1912, at the age of seventy-seven. "Poor Jane!" said Mr. Burroughs one day, when referring to her protests against his writing; "I fear she never read a dozen printed words of mine — or shall I say 'lucky Jane'?"

John, born in 1837, was always "an odd one." (One is reminded of what William R. Thayer said of the Franklin family: "Among the seventeen Franklin children one was a Benjamin, and the rest nobodies.")

Eden was born in 1839. Frail most of his life, in later years he has become robust, and now (1913) is the only surviving member of the family besides Mr. Burroughs. He is cheery and loquacious, methodical and orderly, and very punctilious in dress. (One day, in the summer of 1912, when he was calling at "Woodchuck Lodge," — the summer home where Mr. Burroughs has lived of late years, near the old place where he was born, — this brother recounted some of their youthful exploits, especially the one which yielded the material for the essay "A White Day and a Red Fox." "I shot the fox and got five dollars for it," said Mr. Eden Burroughs, "and John wrote a piece about it, and got seventy-five.")

Abigail, the favorite sister of our author, appreciated her brother's books and his ideals more than any other member of the family. She married and had two children. At the time of her death, in 1901, of typhoid fever (at the age of fifty-eight) the band of brothers and sisters had been unbroken by death for more than thirty-seven years. Her loss was a severe blow to her brother. He had always shared his windfalls with her; she had read some of his essays, and used to talk with

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

him about his aspirations, encouraging him timidly, before he had gained recognition.

Eveline died at the age of five years.

The death of his brother Hiram, in 1904, made the past bleed afresh for Mr. Burroughs. "He was next to Father and Mother in my affections," he wrote. "Oh! if I had only done more for him — this is my constant thought. If I could only have another chance! How generous death makes us! Go, then, and make up by doing more for the living."

As I walked with him about the Old Home, he said, "I can see Hiram in everything here; in the trees he planted and grafted, in these stone walls he built, in this land he so industriously cultivated during the years he had the farm."

So large a place in his affections did this brother hold, and yet how wide apart were these two in their real lives! I know of no one who has pictured the pathos of lives so near and yet so far apart as has George Eliot when she says: "Family likeness has often a deep sadness in it. Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains; blends yearning and repulsion, and ties us by our heart-strings to the beings that jar us at every moment. We hear a voice with the very cadence of our own uttering the thoughts we despise; we see eyes — ah! so like our mother's — averted from us in cold alienation."

We cannot tell why one boy in a family turns out a genius, while the others stay in the ancestral ruts and lead humdrum, placid lives, any more than we can tell why one group of the hepaticas we gather in the April



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

woods has the gift of fragrance, while those of a sister group in the same vicinity are scentless. A caprice of fate, surely, that "mate and mate beget such different issues."

"Hiram was with me at Slabsides," said Mr. Burroughs, "much of the time when I was writing the Whitman book, but never referred to it in any way. When it came from the press, I said to him, 'Hiram, here is the book you have heard me speak about as having cost me nearly four years' work, and which I rewrote four times.'

" 'That's the book, is it?' he replied, showing no curiosity about it, or desire to look into it, but kept drumming on the table — a habit of his that was very annoying to me at times, but of which he was not aware. When 'A Year in the Fields' came out, he looked at some of the pictures, but that was all."

There is something very pathetic in all this — these two brothers living in that isolated cabin in the woods, knit together by the ties of kinship, having in common a deep and yearning love for each other, and for the Old Home in the Catskills, — their daily down-sittings and up-risings outwardly the same, yet so alienated in what makes up one's real existence. The one, the elder, intent on his bees, his thoughts by day revolving about his hives, or concerned with the weather and the daily happenings; at night, as he idly drums with his fingers, dreaming of the old days on the farm — of how he used to dig out rocks to build the fences, of the sugar-making, of cradling the oats in July; while the other — ah! the other, of what was he not thinking! — of the little world of the hives (his thoughts yielding the exquisite "Idyl of the Honey-Bee"), of boyhood days upon the farm, of

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the wild life around his cabin, of the universe, and of the soul of the poet Whitman, that then much misunderstood man, than whom no one so much as he has helped us to appreciate. Going out and in, attending to his homely tasks (for these brothers did their own housework), the younger brother was all the time thinking of that great soul, of all that association with him had meant to him, and of all that Whitman would mean to America, to the world, as poet, prophet, seer — thinking how out of his knowledge of Whitman as poet and person he could cull and sift and gather together an adequate and worthy estimate of one whom his soul loved as Jonathan loved David!

The mystery of personality — how shall one fathom it? I asked myself this one rainy afternoon, as I sat in the Burroughs homestead and looked from one brother to another, the two so alike and yet so unlike. The one a simple farmer whose interests are circumscribed by the hills which surround the farm on which as children they were reared; the other, whose interests in the early years were seemingly just as circumscribed, but who felt that nameless something — that push from within — which first found its outlet in a deeper interest in the life about him than his brothers ever knew; and who later felt the magic of the world of books; and, still later, the need of expression, an expression which finally showed itself in a masterly interpretation of country life and experiences. The same heredity here, the same environment, the same opportunities — yet how different the result! The farmer has tended and gathered many a crop from the old place since they were boys, but has been blind and deaf to all that has there yielded such a harvest to the other. That other, a plain, unassuming

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

man, "standing at ease in nature," has become a household word because of all that he has contributed to our intellectual and emotional life.

A man who as a lad had roamed the Roxbury hills with John Burroughs and his brothers, and had known the boy John as something of a dreamer, and thought of him in later years as perhaps of less account than his brothers (since they had settled down, owned land, and were leading industrious lives), was traveling in Europe in the eighties. On the top of a stage-coach in the Scottish Highlands he sat next a scholarly-looking man whose garb, he thought, betokened a priest. From some question which the traveler put, the Englishman learned that the stranger was from America. Immediately he showed a lively interest. "From America! Do you, then, know John Burroughs?"

Imagine the surprise of the Delaware County farmer at being questioned about his schoolmate, the dreamer, who, to be sure, "took to books"; but what was *he* that this Englishman should inquire about him as the one man in America he was eager to learn about! Doubtless Mr. Burroughs was the one literary man the Delaware County farmer did know, though his knowledge was on the personal and not on the literary side. And imagine the surprise of the priest (if priest it was) to find that he had actually lighted upon a schoolmate of the author! — C. B.]

### CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

I seem to have been a healthy, active child, very impressionable, and with more interests and a keener enjoyment of things than most farm boys

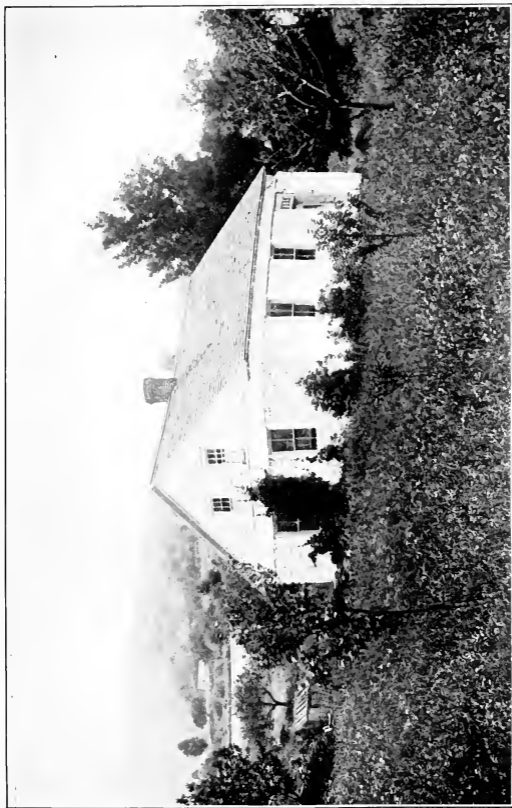
## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

have. I was fond of the girls back as early as I can remember, and had my sweethearts at a very early age. . . .

I learned my letters at school, when I was five or six, in the old-fashioned way by being called up to the teacher several times a day and naming the letters as he pointed at them where they stood in a perpendicular column in Cobb's Spelling-Book. The vowels and consonants stood in separate columns, and had to be learned one by one, by continued repetition. It took me a long time, I remember, to distinguish *b* from *d*, and *c* from *e*. When and how I learned to read I do not remember. I recall Cobb's Second Reader, and later Olney's Geography, and then Dayball's Arithmetic.

I went to school summers till I was old enough to help on the farm, say at the age of eleven or twelve, when my schooling was confined to the winters.

As a boy, the only farm work that appealed to me was sugar-making in the maple woods in spring. This I thoroughly enjoyed. It brought me near to wild nature and was freer from routine than other farm work. Then I soon managed to gather a little harvest of my own from the sugar bush. I used to anticipate the general tapping by a few days or a week, and tap a few trees on my own account along the sunny border of the woods, and boil the sap down on the kitchen stove (to the disgust of the



THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE, ROXBURY, N.Y.

THE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
AND  
ALEXANDER LEITCH AND  
WILSON FOUNDATIONS

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

womenfolks), selling the sugar in the village. I think the first money I ever earned came to me in this way. My first algebra and first grammar I bought with some of this precious money. When I appeared in the village with my basket of small cakes of early sugar, how my customers would hail me and call after me! No one else made such white sugar, or got it to market so early. One season, I remember, I got twelve silver quarters for sugar, and I carried them in my pockets for weeks, jingling them in the face of my envious schoolmates, and at intervals feasting my own eyes upon them. I fear if I could ever again get hold of such money as that was I should become a miser.

Hoeing corn, weeding the garden, and picking stone was drudgery, and haying and harvesting I liked best when they were a good way off; picking up potatoes worried me, but gathering apples suited my hands and my fancy better, and knocking "Juno's cushions" in the spring meadows with my long-handled knocker, about the time the first swallow was heard laughing overhead, was real fun. I always wanted some element of play in my work; buckling down to any sort of routine always galled me, and does yet. The work must be a kind of adventure, and permit of sallies into free fields. Hence the most acceptable work for me was to be sent strawberrying or raspberrying by Mother; but

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the real fun was to go fishing up Montgomery Hollow, or over on Rose's Brook, this necessitating a long tramp, and begetting a hunger in a few hours that made a piece of rye bread the most delectable thing in the world; yet a pure delight that never sated.

Mother used to bake her bread in the large old-fashioned brick oven, and once or twice a week we boys had to procure oven wood.

"You must get me oven wood this morning," she would say; "I am going to bake to-day." Then we would scurry around for dry, light, quick wood — pieces of old boxes and boards, and dry limbs. "One more armful," she would often say, when we were inclined to quit too soon. In a half-hour or so, the wood would be reduced to ashes, and the oven properly heated. I can see Mother yet as she would open the oven door and feel the air inside with her hand. "Run, quick, and get me a few more sticks — it is not quite hot enough." When it was ready, the coals and ashes were raked out, and in went the bread, six or seven big loaves of rye, with usually two of wheat. The wheat was for company.

When we would come in at dinner- or supper-time and see wheat bread on the table we would ask: "Who's in the other room?" Maybe the answer would be, "Your Uncle Martin and Aunt Virey."



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

How glad I would be! I always liked to see company. Well, the living was better, and then, company brought a new element into the day; it gave a little tinge of romance to things. To wake up in the morning and think that Uncle Martin and Aunt Virey were there, or Uncle Edmund and Aunt Saliny, quickened the pulse a little. Or, when any of my cousins came, — boys near my own age, — what joy filled the days! And when they went, how lonesome I would be! how forlorn all things looked till the second or third day! I early developed a love of comrades, and was always fond of company — and am yet, as the records of Slabsides show.

I was quite a hunter in my youth, as most farm boys are, but I never brought home much game — a gray squirrel, a partridge, or a wild pigeon occasionally. I think with longing and delight of the myriads of wild pigeons that used to come every two or three years — covering the sky for a day or two, and making the naked spring woods gay and festive with their soft voices and fluttering blue wings. I have seen thousands of them go through a beech wood, like a blue wave, picking up the sprouting beechnuts. Those in the rear would be constantly flying over those in front, so that the effect was that of a vast billow of mingled white and blue

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and brown, rustling and murmuring as it went. One spring afternoon vast flocks of them were passing south over our farm for hours, when some of them began to pour down in the beech woods on the hill by the roadside. A part of nearly every flock that streamed by would split off and, with a downward wheel and rush, join those in the wood. Presently I seized the old musket and ran out in the road, and then crept up behind the wall, till only the width of the road separated me from the swarms of fluttering pigeons. The air and the woods were literally blue with them, and the ground seemed a yard deep with them. I pointed my gun across the wall at the surging masses, and then sat there spellbound. The sound of their wings and voices filled my ears, and their numbers more than filled my eyes. Why I did not shoot was never very clear to me. Maybe I thought the world was all turning to pigeons, as they still came pouring down from the heavens, and I did not want to break the spell. There I sat waiting, waiting, with my eye looking along the gun-barrel, till, suddenly, the mass rose like an explosion, and with a rush and a roar they were gone. Then I came to my senses and with keen mortification realized what an opportunity I had let slip. Such a chance never came again, though the last great flight of pigeons did not take place till 1875.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

When I was about ten or twelve, a spell was put upon me by a red fox in a similar way. The baying of a hound upon the mountain had drawn me there, armed with the same old musket. It was a chilly day in early December. I took up my stand in the woods near what I thought might be the runway, and waited. After a while I stood the butt of my gun upon the ground, and held the barrel with my hand. Presently I heard a rustle in the leaves, and there came a superb fox loping along past me, not fifty feet away. He was evidently not aware of my presence, and, as for me, I was aware of his presence alone. I forgot that I had a gun, that here was the game I was in quest of, and that now was my chance to add to my store of silver quarters. As the unsuspecting fox disappeared over a knoll, again I came to my senses, and brought my gun to my shoulder; but it was too late, the game had gone. I returned home full of excitement at what I had seen, and gave as the excuse why I did not shoot, that I had my mitten on, and could not reach the trigger of my gun. It is true I had my mitten on, but there was a mitten, or something, on my wits also. It was years before I heard the last of that mitten; when I failed at anything they said, "John had his mitten on, I guess."

I remember that I had a sort of cosmogony of my own when I was a mere boy. I used to speculate

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

as to what the world was made of. Partly closing my eyes, I could see what appeared to be little crooked chains of fine bubbles floating in the air, and I concluded that that was the stuff the world was made of. And the philosophers have not yet arrived at a much more satisfactory explanation.

In thinking of my childhood and youth I try to define to myself wherein I differed from my brothers and from other boys in the neighborhood, or wherein I showed any indication of the future bent of my mind. I see that I was more curious and alert than most boys, and had more interests outside my special duties as a farm boy. I knew pretty well the ways of the wild bees and hornets when I was only a small lad. I knew the different bumblebees, and had made a collection of their combs and honey before I had entered my teens. I had watched the little frogs, the hylas, and had captured them and held them till they piped sitting in my hand. I had watched the leaf-cutters and followed them to their nests in an old rail, or under a stone. I see that I early had an interest in the wild life about me that my brothers did not have. I was a natural observer from childhood, had a quick, sure eye and ear, and an eager curiosity. I loved to roam the hills and woods and prowl along the streams, just to come in contact with the wild and the adventurous. I was not sent to Sunday-school, but was

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

allowed to spend the day as I saw fit, provided I did not carry a gun or a fishing-rod. Indeed, the foundation of my knowledge of the ways of the wild creatures was laid when I was a farm boy, quite unconscious of the natural-history value of my observations.

What, or who, as I grew up, gave my mind its final push in this direction would not be easy to name. It is quite certain that I got it through literature, and more especially through the works of Audubon, when I was twenty-five or twenty-six years of age.

The sentiment of nature is so full and winsome in the best modern literature that I was no doubt greatly influenced by it. I was early drawn to Wordsworth and to our own Emerson and Thoreau, and to the nature articles in the "Atlantic Monthly," and my natural-history tastes were stimulated by them.

I have a suspicion that "nature-study" as now followed in the schools — or shall I say in the colleges? — this classroom peeping and prying into the mechanism of life, dissecting, probing, tabulating, void of free observation, and shut away from the open air — would have cured me of my love of nature. For love is the main thing, the prime thing, and to train the eye and ear and acquaint one with the spirit of the great-out-of-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

doors, rather than a lot of minute facts about nature, is, or should be, the object of nature-study. Who cares about the anatomy of the frog? But to know the live frog — his place in the season and the landscape, and his life-history — is something. If I wanted to instill the love of nature into a child's heart, I should do it, in the first place, through country life, and, in the next place, through the best literature, rather than through classroom investigations, or through books of facts about the mere mechanics of nature. Biology is all right for the few who wish to specialize in that branch, but for the mass of pupils, it is a waste of time. Love of nature cannot be commanded or taught, but in some minds it can be stimulated.

Sweet were the days of my youth! How I love to recall them and dwell upon them!— a world apart, separated from the present by a gulf like that of sidereal space. The old farm bending over the hills and dipping down into the valleys, the woods, the streams, the springs, the mountains, and Father and Mother under whose wings I was so protected, and all my brothers and sisters — how precious the thought of them all! Can the old farm ever mean to future boys what it meant to me, and enter so deeply into their lives? No doubt it can, hard as it is to believe it. The "Rundle place," the "barn

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

on the hill," the "Deacon woods," the clover meadow, the "turn in the road," the burying-ground, the sheep-lot, the bush-lot, the sumac-lot, the "new-barn meadow," the "old-barn meadow," and so on through the list — each field and section of the farm had to me an atmosphere and association of its own. The long, smooth, broad hill — a sort of thigh of the mountain (Old Clump) upon the lower edge of which the house is planted — shut off the west and southwest winds; its fields were all amenable to the plough, yielding good crops of oats, rye, buckwheat, potatoes, or, when in grass, yielding good pasture, divided east and west by parallel stone walls; this hill, or lower slope of the mountain, was one of the principal features of the farm. It was steep, but it was smooth; it was broad-backed and fertile; its soil was made up mainly of decomposed old red sandstone. How many times have I seen its different sections grow ruddy under the side-hill plough! One of my earliest recollections of my father is seeing him, when I was a child of three or four, striding across the middle side-hill lot with a bag slung across his breast, scattering the seed-grain.

How often at early nightfall, while the west was yet glowing, have I seen the grazing cattle silhouetted against the sky. In the winter the northwest winds would sweep the snow clean from the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

other side, and bring it over to our side and leave it in a long, huge drift that buried the fences and gave the hill an extra full-breasted appearance. The breast of the old hill would be padded with ten or fifteen feet of snow. This drift would often last till May. I have seen it stop the plough. I remember once carrying a jug of water up to Brother Curtis when his plough was within a few feet of the snow. Woodchucks would sometimes feel the spring through this thick coverlid of snow and bore up through it to the sunlight. I think the woodchuck's alarm clock always goes off before April is done, and he comes forth, apparently not to break his long fast, but to find his mate.

I remember working in oats in the middle side-hill lot one September during the early years of the Civil War, when Hiram was talking of enlisting as a drummer, and when Father and Mother were much worried about it. I carried together the sheaves, putting fifteen in a "shock."

I have heard my father tell of a curious incident that once befell his hired man and himself when they were drawing in oats on a sled from the first side-hill lot. They had on a load, and the hired man had thrust his fork into the upper sides of it and was bringing his weight to bear against its tendency to capsize. But gravity got the better of them and over went the load; the hired man (Rueb



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Dart) clung to his fork, and swung over the load through the air, alighting on his feet none the worse for the adventure.

The spring that supplies the house and the dairy with water comes from the middle side-hill lot, some forty or fifty rods from the house, and is now brought down in pipes; in my time, in pump-logs. It was always an event when the old logs had to be taken up and new ones put down. I saw the logs renewed twice in my time; once poplar logs were used, and once hemlock, both rather short-lived. A man from a neighboring town used to come with his long auger and bore the logs — a spectacle I was never tired of looking at.

Then the sap bush in the groin of the hill, and but a few minutes' walk from the house, what a feature that was! In winter and in summer, what delightful associations I have with it! I know each of its great sugar maples as I know my friends or the members of the family. Each has a character of its own, and in sap-producing capacity they differ greatly. A fringe of the great trees stood out in the open fields; these were the earliest to run.

In early March we used to begin to make ready for sugar-making by overhauling the sap "spiles," resharpening the old ones, and making new ones. The old-fashioned awkward sap-gouge was used in tapping in those days, and the "spiles" or spouts

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

were split out of basswood blocks with this gouge, and then sharpened so as to fit the half-round gash which the gouge made in the tree. The dairy milk-pans were used to catch the sap, and huge iron kettles to boil it down in.

When the day came to tap the bush, the caldrons, the hogsheads, and the two hundred or more pans with the bundles of spiles were put upon the sled and drawn by the oxen up to the boiling-place in the sap bush. Father and Brother Hiram did the tapping, using an axe to cut the gash in the tree, and to drive in the gouge below it to make a place for the spile, while one of my younger brothers and I carried the pans and placed them in position.

It was always a glad time with me; the early birds were singing and calling, the snowbanks were melting, the fields were getting bare, the roads drying, and spring tokens were on every hand. We gathered the sap by hand in those days, two pails and a neck-yoke. It was sturdy work. We would usually begin about three or four o'clock, and by five have the one hundred and fifty pailfuls of sap in the hogsheads. When the sap ran all night, we would begin the gathering in the morning. The syruping-off usually took place at the end of the second day's boiling, when two or three hundred pailfuls of sap had been reduced to four or five of

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

syrup. In the March or April twilight, or maybe after dark, we would carry those heavy pails of syrup down to the house, where the liquid was strained while still hot. The reduction of it to sugar was done upon the kitchen stove, from three hundred to five hundred pounds being about the average annual yield.

The bright warm days at the boiling-place I love best to remember; the robins running about over the bare ground or caroling from the treetops, the nuthatches calling, the crows walking about the brown fields, the bluebirds flitting here and there, the cows lowing or restless in the barnyard.

When I think of the storied lands across the Atlantic, — England, France, Germany, Italy, so rich in historical associations, steeped in legend and poetry, the very look of the fields redolent of the past, — and then turn to my own native hills, how poor and barren they seem! — not one touch anywhere of that which makes the charm of the Old World — no architecture, no great names; in fact, no past. They look naked and prosy, yet how I love them and cling to them! They are written over with the lives of the first settlers that cleared the fields and built the stone walls — simple, commonplace lives, worthy and interesting, but without the appeal of heroism or adventure.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

The land here is old, geologically, dating back to the Devonian Age, the soil in many places of decomposed old red sandstone; but it is new in human history, having been settled only about one hundred and fifty years.

Time has worn down the hills and mountains so that all the outlines of the country are gentle and flowing. The valleys are long, open, and wide; the hills broad and smooth, no angles or abruptness, or sharp contrasts anywhere. Hence it is not what is called a picturesque land — full of bits of scenery that make the artist's fingers itch. The landscape has great repose and gentleness, so far as long, sweeping lines and broad, smooth slopes can give this impression. It is a land which has never suffered violence at the hands of the interior terrestrial forces; nothing is broken or twisted or contorted or thrust out or up abruptly. The strata are all horizontal, and the steepest mountain-slopes clothed with soil that nourishes large forest growths.

I stayed at home, working on the farm in summer and going to school in winter, till I was seventeen. From the time I was fourteen I had had a desire to go away to school. I had a craving for knowledge which my brothers did not share. One fall when I was about fifteen I had the promise

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

from Father that I might go to school at the Academy in the village that winter. But I did not go. Then the next fall I had the promise of going to the Academy at Harpersfield, where one of the neighbor's boys, Dick Van Dyke, went. How I dreamed of Harpersfield! That fall I did my first ploughing, stimulated to it by the promise of Harpersfield. It was in September, in the lot above the sugar bush — cross-ploughing, to prepare the ground for rye. How many days I ploughed, I do not remember; but Harpersfield was the lure at the end of each furrow, I remember that. To this day I cannot hear the name without seeing a momentary glow upon my mental horizon — a finger of enchantment is for an instant laid upon me.

But I did not go to Harpersfield. When the time drew near for me to go, Father found himself too poor, or the expense looked too big — none of the other boys had had such privileges, and why should I? So I swallowed my disappointment and attended the home district school for another winter. Yet I am not sure but I went to Harpersfield after all. The desire, the yearning to go, the effort to make myself worthy to go, the mental awakening, and the high dreams, were the main matter. I doubt if the reality would have given me anything more valuable than these things. The aspiration

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

for knowledge opens the doors of the mind and makes ready for her coming.

These were my first and last days at the plough, and they made that field memorable to me. I never cross it now but I see myself there — a callow youth being jerked by the plough-handles but with my head in a cloud of alluring day-dreams. This, I think, was in the fall of 1853. I went to school that winter with a view to leaving home in the spring to try my luck at school-teaching in an adjoining county. Many Roxbury boys had made their first start in the world by going to Ulster County to teach a country school. I would do the same. So, late in March, 1854, about the end of the sugar season, I set out for Olive, Ulster County. An old neighbor, Dr. Hull, lived there, and I would seek him.

There was only a stage-line at that time connecting the two counties, and that passed twelve miles from my home. My plan was to cross the mountain into Red Kill to Uncle Martin Kelly's, pass the night there, and in the morning go to Clovesville, three miles distant, and take the stage. How well I remember that walk across the mountain in a snow-squall through which the sun shone dimly, a black oilcloth satchel in my hand, and in my heart vague yearnings and forebodings! I had but a few dollars in my pocket, probably six or seven, most of which

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

I had earned by selling maple sugar. Father was willing I should go, though my help was needed on the farm.

Well, I traversed the eight miles to my uncle's in good time, and in the morning he drove me down to the turnpike to take the stage. I remember well my anxious and agitated state of mind while waiting at the hotel for the arrival of the stage. I had never ridden in one, I am not sure that I had even seen one, and I did not know just what was expected of me, or just how I should deport myself. An untraveled farm boy at seventeen is such a vague creature anyway, and I was, in addition, such a bundle of sensibilities, timidities, and embarrassments as few farm boys are. I paid my fare at the hotel at the rate of a sixpence a mile for about thirty-two miles, and when the stage came, saw my name entered upon the "waybill," and got aboard with a beating heart.

Of that first ride of my life in a public conveyance, I remember little. The stage was one of those old-fashioned rocking Concord coaches, drawn by four horses. We soon left the snow-clad hills of Delaware County behind, and dropped down into the milder climate of Ulster, where no snow was to be seen. About three in the afternoon the stage put me down at Terry's Tavern on the "plank-road" in Olive. I inquired the way to Dr. Hull's and found

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the walk of about a mile an agreeable change. The doctor and his wife welcomed me cordially. They were old friends of my family. I spent a day with them, riding about with the doctor on his visits to patients, and making inquiries for a school in want of a teacher. On the third day we heard of a vacancy in a district in the west end of the town, seven or eight miles distant, called Tongore. Hither I walked one day, saw the trustees, and made my application. I suspect my youth and general greenness caused them to hesitate; they would consider and let me know inside of a week. So, in a day or two, hearing of no other vacancies, I returned home the same way I had come. It was the first day of April when I made the return trip. I remember this because at one of the hotels where we changed horses I saw a copper cent lying upon the floor, and, stooping to pick it up, found it nailed fast. The bartender and two or three other spectators had a quiet chuckle at my expense. Before the week was out a letter came from the Tongore trustees saying I could have the school; wages, ten dollars the first month, and, if I proved satisfactory, eleven for the other five months, and "board around."

I remember the handwriting of that letter as if I had received it but yesterday. "Come at your earliest opportunity." How vividly I recall the



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

round hand in which those words were written! I replied that I would be on hand the next week, ready to open school on Monday, the 11th.

Again I took the stage, my father driving me twelve miles to Dimmock's Corners to meet it, a trip which he made with me many times in after years, Mother always getting up and preparing our breakfast long before daylight. We were always in a more or less anxious frame of mind upon the road lest we be too late for the stage, but only once during the many trips did we miss it. On that occasion it had passed a few minutes before we arrived, but, knowing it stopped for breakfast at Griffin's Corners, four or five miles beyond, I hastened on afoot, running most of the way, and arrived in sight of it just as the driver had let off the first crack from his whip to start his reluctant horses. My shouting was quickly passed to him by the onlookers, he pulled up, and I won the race quite out of breath.

On the present occasion we were in ample time, and my journey ended at Shokan, from which place I walked the few miles to Tongore, in the late April afternoon. The little frogs were piping, and I remember how homesick the familiar spring sound made me. As I walked along the road near sun-down with this sound in my ears, I saw coming toward me a man with a gait as familiar as was the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

piping of the frogs. He turned out to be our neighbor Warren Scudder, and how delighted I was to see him in that lonesome land! He had sold a yoke of oxen down there and had been down to deliver them. The home ties pulled very strongly at sight of him. Warren's three boys, Reub and Jack and Smith, were our nearest boy neighbors. His father, old Deacon Scudder, was one of the notable characters of the town. Warren himself had had some varied experiences. He was one of the leaders in the anti-rent war of ten years before. Indeed, he was chief of the band of "Indians" that shot Steel, the sheriff, at Andes, and it was charged that the bullet from his pistol was the one that did the fatal work. At any rate, he had had to flee the country, escaping concealed in a peddler's cart, while close pressed by the posse. He went South and was absent several years. After the excitement of the murder and the struggle between the two factions had died down, he returned and was not molested. And here he was in the April twilight, on my path to Tongore, and the sight of him cheered my heart.

I began my school Monday morning, April the 11th, 1854, and continued it for six months, teaching the common branches to twenty or thirty pupils from the ages of six to twelve or thirteen. I can distinctly recall the faces of many of those boys

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

and girls to this day—Jane North, a slender, clean-cut girl of ten or eleven; Elizabeth McClelland, a fat, freckled girl of twelve; Alice Twilliger, a thin, talkative girl with a bulging forehead. Two or three of the boys became soldiers in the Civil War, and fell in the battle of Gettysburg.

[In April, 1912, Mr. Burroughs received the following: "Hearty congratulations upon your seventy-fifth birthday, from your old Tongore pupil of many years ago. R—B—."]

I "boarded round," going home with the children as they invited me. I was always put in the spare room, and usually treated to warm biscuit and pie for supper. A few families were very poor, and there I was lucky to get bread and potatoes. In one house I remember the bedstead was very shaky, and in the middle of the night, as I turned over, it began to sway and lurch, and presently all went down in a heap. But I clung to the wreck till morning, and said nothing about it then.

I remember that a notable eclipse of the sun occurred that spring on the 26th of May, when the farmers were planting their corn.

What books I read that summer I cannot recall. Yes, I recall one—"The Complete Letter-Writer," which I bought of a peddler, and upon which I

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

modeled many of my letters to various persons, among others to a Roxbury girl for whom I had a mild fancy. My first letter to a girl I wrote to her, and a ridiculously stiff, formal, and awkward letter it was, I assure you. I am positive I addressed her as "Dear Madam," and started off with some sentence from "The Complete Letter-Writer," so impressed was I that there was a best way to do this thing, and that the book pointed it out. Mary's reply was, "To my absent, but not forgotten friend," and was simple and natural as girls' letters usually are. My Grandfather Kelly died that season, and I recall that I wrote a letter of condolence to my people, modeled upon one in the book. How absurd and stilted and unreal it must have sounded to them!

Oh, how crude and callow and obtuse I was at that time, full of vague and tremulous aspirations and awakenings, but undisciplined, uninformed, with many inherited incapacities and obstacles to weigh me down. I was extremely bashful, had no social aptitude, and was likely to stutter when anxious or embarrassed, yet I seem to have made a good impression. I was much liked in school and out, and was fairly happy. I seem to see sunshine over all when I look back there. But it was a long summer to me. I had never been from home more than

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

a day or two at a time before, and I became very homesick. Oh, to walk in the orchard back of the house, or along the road, or to see the old hills again — what a joy it would have been! But I stuck it out till my term ended in October, and then went home, taking a young fellow from the district (a brother of some girls I fancied) with me. I took back nearly all my wages, over fifty dollars, and with this I planned to pay my way at Hedding Literary Institute, in the adjoining county of Greene, during the coming winter term.

I left home for the school late in November, riding the thirty miles with Father, atop a load of butter. It was the time of year when the farmers took their butter to Catskill. Father usually made two trips. This was the first one of the season, and I accompanied him as far as Ashland, where the Institute was located.

I remained at school there three months, the length of the winter term, and studied fairly hard. I had a room by myself and enjoyed the life with the two hundred or more boys and girls of my own age. I studied algebra, geometry, chemistry, French, and logic, wrote compositions, and declaimed in the chapel, as the rules required. It was at this time that I first read Milton. We had to parse in "Paradise Lost," and I recall how I was

shocked and astonished by that celestial warfare. I told one of my classmates that I did not believe a word of it. Among my teachers was a young, delicate, wide-eyed man who in later life became well known as Bishop Hurst, of the Methodist Church. He heard our small class in logic at seven o'clock in the morning, in a room that was never quite warmed by the newly kindled fire. I don't know how I came to study logic (Whately's). I had never heard of such a study before; maybe that is why I chose it. I got little out of it. What an absurd study, taught, as it was, as an aid to argumentation! — like teaching a man to walk by explaining to him the mechanism of walking. The analysis of one sound argument, or of one weak one, in terms of common sense, is worth any amount of such stuff. But it was of a piece with grammar and rhetoric as then taught — all preposterous studies viewed as helps toward correct writing and speaking. Think of our parsing Milton as an aid to mastering the English language!

I remember I stood fairly high in composition — only one boy in the school ahead of me, and that was Herman Coons, to whom I became much attached, and who became a Methodist minister. He went home with me during the holiday vacation. After leaving school we corresponded for several years, and then lost track of each other.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

I do not know that there is one of my schoolmates of that time now living. I know of none that became eminent in any field. One of the boys was fatally injured that winter while coasting. I remember sitting up with him many nights and ministering to him. He died in a few weeks.

It was an event when Father and Mother came to visit me for a few hours, and Mother brought me some mince pies. What feasts two or three other boys and I had in my room over those home-made pies!

Toward spring we had a public debate in the chapel, and I was chosen as one of the disputants. We debated the question of the Crimean War, which was on then. I was on the side of England and France against Russia. Our side won. I think I spoke very well. I remember that I got much of my ammunition from a paper in "Harper's Magazine," probably by Dr. Osgood. It seems my fellow on the affirmative had got much of his ammunition from the same source, and, as I spoke first, there was not much powder left for him, and he was greatly embarrassed.

What insignificant things one remembers in a world of small events! I recall how one morning when we had all gathered in chapel for prayers, none of the professors appeared on the platform but our French teacher, and, as praying for us was not

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

one of his duties, he hurried off to find some one to perform that function, while we all sat and giggled.

. . . . .

In the spring of 1855, with eight or ten dollars in my pocket which Father had advanced me, I made my first visit to New York by steamer from Catskill, on my way to New Jersey in quest of a position as school-teacher. Three of our neighborhood boys were then teaching in or near Plainfield, and I sought them out, having my first ride on the cars on that trip from Jersey City. As I sat there in my seat waiting for the train to start, I remember I actually wondered if the starting would be so sudden as to jerk my hat off!

I was too late to find a vacancy in any of the schools in the districts I visited. On one occasion I walked from Somerville twelve miles to a village where there was a vacancy, but the trustees, after looking me over, concluded I was too young and inexperienced for their large school. That night the occultation of Venus by the moon took place. I remember gazing at it long and long.

On my return in May I stopped in New York and spent a day prowling about the second-hand book-stalls, and spent so much of my money for books that I had only enough left to carry me to



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Griffin's Corners, twelve miles from home. I bought Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," Dr. Johnson's works, Saint-Pierre's "Studies of Nature," and Dick's works and others. Dick was a Scottish philosopher whose two big fat volumes held something that caught my mind as I dipped into them. But I got little from him and soon laid him aside. On this and other trips to New York I was always drawn by the second-hand book-stalls. How I hovered about them, how good the books looked, how I wanted them all! To this day, when I am passing them, the spirit of those days lays its hand upon me, and I have to pause a few moments and, half-dreaming, half-longing, run over the titles. Nearly all my copies of the English classics I have picked up at these curbstone stalls. How much more they mean to me than new books of later years! Here, for instance, are two volumes of Dr. Johnson's works in good leather binding, library style, which I have carried with me from one place to another for over fifty years, and which in my youth I read and reread, and the style of which I tried to imitate before I was twenty. When I dip into "The Rambler" and "The Idler" now how dry and stilted and artificial their balanced sentences seem! yet I treasure them for what they once were to me. In my first essay in the "Atlantic," forty-six years ago [in 1860], I said that

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

Johnson's periods acted like a lever of the third kind, and that the power applied always exceeded the weight raised; and this comparison seems to hit the mark very well. I did not read Boswell's Life of him till much later. In his conversation Johnson got the fulcrum in the right place.

I reached home on the twentieth of May with an empty pocket and an empty stomach, but with a bagful of books. I remember the day because the grass was green, but the air was full of those great "goose-feather" flakes of snow which sometimes fall in late May.

I stayed home that summer of '55 and worked on the farm, and pored over my books when I had a chance. I must have found Locke's "Essay" pretty tough reading, but I remember buckling to it, getting right down on "all fours," as one has to, to follow Locke.

I think it was that summer that I read my first novel, "Charlotte Temple," and was fairly intoxicated with it. It let loose a flood of emotion in me. I remember finishing it one morning and then going out to work in the hay-field, and how the homely and familiar scenes fairly revolted me. I dare say the story took away my taste for Locke and Johnson for a while.

In early September I again turned my face

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Jerseyward in quest of a school, but stopped on my way in Olive to visit friends in Tongore. The school there, since I had left it, had fared badly. One of the teachers the boys had turned out of doors, and the others had "failed to give satisfaction"; so I was urged to take the school again. The trustees offered to double my wages—twenty-two dollars a month. After some hesitation I gave up the Jersey scheme and accepted the trustees' offer.

. . . . .

It was during that second term of teaching at Tongore that I first met Ursula North, who later became my wife. Her uncle was one of the trustees of the school, and I presume it was this connection that brought her to the place and led to our meeting.

If I had gone on to Jersey in that fall of '55, my life might have been very different in many ways. I might have married some other girl, might have had a large family of children, and the whole course of my life might have been greatly changed. It frightens me now to think that I might have missed the Washington life, and Whitman, . . . and much else that has counted for so much with me. What I might have gained is, in the scale, like imponderable air.

I read my Johnson and Locke that winter and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

tried to write a little in the Johnsonese buckram style. The young man to-day, under the same conditions, would probably spend his evenings reading novels or the magazines. I spent mine poring over "The Rambler."

In April I closed the school and went home, again taking a young fellow with me. I was then practically engaged to Ursula North, and I wrote her a poem on reaching home. About the middle of April I left home for Cooperstown Seminary. I rode to Moresville with Jim Bouton, and as the road between there and Stamford was so blocked with snowdrifts that the stage could not run, I was compelled to walk the eight miles, leaving my trunk behind. From Stamford I reached Cooperstown after an all-night ride by stage.

My summer at Cooperstown was an enjoyable and a profitable one. I studied Latin, French, English literature, algebra, and geometry. If I remember correctly, I stood first in composition over the whole school. I joined the Websterian Society and frequently debated, and was one of the three or four orators chosen by the school to "orate" in a grove on the shore of the lake, on the Fourth of July. I held forth in the true spread-eagle style.

I entered into the sports of the school, ball-

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

playing and rowing on the lake, with the zest of youth.

One significant thing I remember: I was always on the lookout for books of essays. It was at this time that I took my first bite into Emerson, and it was like tasting a green apple — not that he was unripe, but I was n't ripe for him. But a year later I tasted him again, and said, "Why, this tastes good"; and took a bigger bite; then soon devoured everything of his I could find.

I say I was early on the lookout for books of essays, and I wanted the essay to begin, not in a casual way by some remark in the first person, but by the annunciation of some general truth, as most of Dr. Johnson's did. I think I bought Dick's works on the strength of his opening sentence — "Man is a compound being."

As one's mind develops, how many changes in taste he passes through! About the time of which I am now writing, Pope was my favorite poet. His wit and common sense appealed to me. Young's "Night Thoughts" also struck me as very grand. Whipple seemed to me a much greater writer than Emerson. Shakespeare I did not come to appreciate till years later, and Chaucer and Spenser I have never learned to care for.

I am sure the growth of my literary taste has been along the right lines — from the formal and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the complex, to the simple and direct. Now, the less the page seems written, that is, the more natural and instinctive it is, other things being equal, the more it pleases me. I would have the author take no thought of his style, as such; yet if his sentences are clothed like the lilies of the field, so much the better. Unconscious beauty that flows inevitably and spontaneously out of the subject, or out of the writer's mind, how it takes us!

My own first attempts at writing were, of course, crude enough. It took me a long time to put aside all affectation and make-believe, if I have ever quite succeeded in doing it, and get down to what I really saw and felt. But I think now I can tell dead wood in my writing when I see it — tell when I fumble in my mind, or when my sentences glance off and fail to reach the quick.

[In August, 1902, Mr. Burroughs wrote me of a visit to Cooperstown, after all these years: "I found Cooperstown not much changed. The lake and the hills were, of course, the same as I had known them forty-six years ago, and the main street seemed but little altered. Of the old seminary only the foundations were standing, and the trees had so grown about it that I hardly knew the place. I again dipped my oar in the lake, again stood beside Cooper's grave, and threaded some of the streets I had known so well. I wished I could have been alone there. . . . I wanted to muse and dream, and invoke the spirit of other days, but the spirits would not rise

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

in the presence of strangers. I could not quite get a glimpse of the world as it appeared to me in those callow days. It was here that I saw my first live author (spoken of in my 'Egotistical Chapter') and first dipped into Emerson."

After leaving the Seminary at Cooperstown in July of 1856, the young student worked on the home farm in the Catskills until fall, when he began teaching school at Buffalo Grove, Illinois, where he taught until the following spring, returning East to marry, as he says, "the girl I left behind me."

He then taught in various schools in New York and New Jersey, until the fall of 1863. As a rule, in the summer he worked on the home farm.

During this period he was reading much, and trying his hand at writing. There was a short intermission in his teaching, when he invested his earnings in a patent buckle, and for a brief period he had dreams of wealth. But the buckle project failed, the dreams vanished, and he began to read medicine, and resumed his teaching.

From 1859 to 1862 he was writing much, on philosophical subjects mainly. It was in 1863 that he first became interested in the birds. — C. B.]

Ever since the time when in my boyhood I saw the strange bird in the woods of which I have told you, the thought had frequently occurred to me, "I shall know the birds some day." But nothing came of the thought and wish till the spring of '63, when I was teaching school near West Point. In the library of the Military Academy, which I frequently

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

visited of a Saturday, I chanced upon the works of Audubon. I took fire at once. It was like bringing together fire and powder! I was ripe for the adventure; I had leisure, I was in a good bird country, and I had Audubon to stimulate me, as well as a collection of mounted birds belonging to the Academy for reference. How eagerly and joyously I took up the study! It fitted in so well with my country tastes and breeding; it turned my enthusiasm as a sportsman into a new channel; it gave to my walks a new delight; it made me look upon every grove and wood as a new storehouse of possible treasures. I could go fishing or camping or picknicking now with my resources for enjoyment doubled. That first hooded warbler that I discovered and identified in a near-by bushy field one Sunday morning — shall I ever forget the thrill of delight it gave me? And when in August I went with three friends into the Adirondacks, no day or place or detention came amiss to me; new birds were calling and flitting on every hand; a new world was opened to me in the midst of the old.

At once I was moved to write about the birds, and I began my first paper, "The Return of the Birds," that fall, and finished it in Washington, whither I went in October, and where I lived for ten years. Writing about the birds and always treating them in connection with the season and



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

their environment, was, while I was a government clerk, a kind of vacation. It enabled me to live over again my days amid the sweet rural things and influences. The paper just referred to is, as you may see, mainly written out of my memories as a farm boy. The enthusiasm which Audubon had begotten in me quickened and gave value to all my youthful experiences and observations of the birds.

[This brings us to the time when our subject is fairly launched on early manhood. He has regular employment — a clerkship in the office of the Comptroller of the Currency, which, if not especially congenial in itself, affords him leisure to do the things he most wishes to do. He is even now growing in strength and efficiency as an essayist. — C. B.]

### SELF-ANALYSIS

March, 1906

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

You once asked me how, considering my antecedents and youthful environment, I accounted for myself; what sent me to Nature, and to writing about her, and to literature generally. I wish I could answer you satisfactorily, but I fear I cannot. I do not know, myself; I can only guess at it.

I have always looked upon myself as a kind of sport; I came out of the air quite as much as out of my family. All my weaknesses and insufficiencies — and there are a lot of them — are inherited,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

but of my intellectual qualities, there is not much trace in my immediate forbears. No scholars or thinkers or lovers of books, or men of intellectual pursuits for several generations back of me — all obscure farmers or laborers in humble fields, rather grave, religiously inclined men, I gather, sober, industrious, good citizens, good neighbors, correct livers, but with no very shining qualities. My four brothers were of this stamp — home-bodies, rather timid, non-aggressive men, somewhat below the average in those qualities and powers that insure worldly success — the kind of men that are so often crowded to the wall. I can see myself in some of them, especially in Hiram, who had day-dreams, who was always going West, but never went; who always wanted some plaything — fancy sheep or pigs or poultry; who was a great lover of bees and always kept them; who was curious about strange lands, but who lost heart and hope as soon as he got beyond the sight of his native hills; and who usually got cheated in every bargain he made. Perhaps it is because I see myself in him that Hiram always seemed nearer to me than any of the rest. I have at times his vagueness, his indefiniteness, his irresolution, and his want of spirit when imposed upon.

Poor Hiram! One fall in his simplicity he took his fancy Cotswold sheep to the State Fair at Syra-

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

cuse, never dreaming but that a farmer entirely outside of all the rings and cliques, and quite unknown, could get the prize if his stock was the best. I can see him now, hanging about the sheep-pens, homesick, insignificant, unnoticed, living on cake and pie, and wondering why a prize label was not put upon his sheep. Poor Hiram! Well, he marched up the hill with his sheep, and then he marched down again, a sadder and, I hope, a wiser man.

Once he ordered a fancy rifle, costing upwards of a hundred dollars, of a gunsmith in Utica. When the rifle came, it did not suit him, was not according to specifications; so he sent it back. Not long after that the man failed and no rifle came, and the money was not returned. Then Hiram concluded to make a journey out there. I was at home at the time, and can see him yet as he started off along the road that June day, off for Utica on foot. Again he marched up the hill, and then marched down, and no rifle or money ever came.

For years he had the Western fever, and kept his valise under his bed packed ready for the trip. Once he actually started and got as far as White Pigeon, Michigan. There his courage gave out, and he came back. Still he kept his valise packed, but the end of his life's journey came before he was ready to go West again.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

Hiram, as you know, came to live with me at Slabsides during the last years of his life. He had made a failure of it on the old farm, after I had helped him purchase it; nearly everything had gone wrong, indoors and out; and he was compelled to give it up. So he brought his forty or more skips of bees to West Park and lived with me, devoting himself, not very successfully, to bee-culture. He loved to "fuss" with bees. I think the money he got for his honey looked a little more precious to him than other money, just as the silver quarters I used to get when a boy for the maple sugar I made had a charm and a value no quarters have ever had in my eyes since.

That thing in Hiram that was so appealed to by his bee-culture, and by any fancy strain of sheep or poultry, is strong in me, too, and has played an important part in my life. If I had not taken it out in running after wild nature and writing about it I should probably have been a bee-man, or a fancy-stock farmer. As it is, I have always been a bee-lover, and have usually kept several swarms. Ordinary farming is prosy and tiresome compared with bee-farming. Combined with poultry-raising, it always had special attractions for me. When I was a farm boy of twelve or thirteen years, one of our neighbors had a breed of chickens with large topknots that filled my eye completely. My bro-

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

ther and I used to hang around the Chase henyard for hours, admiring and longing for those chickens. The impression those fowls made upon me seems as vivid to-day as it was when first made. The topknot was the extra touch — the touch of poetry that I have always looked for in things, and that Hiram, in his way, craved and sought for, too.

There was something, too, in my maternal grandfather that probably foreshadowed the nature-lover and nature-writer. In him it took the form of a love of angling, and a love for the Bible. He went from the Book to the stream, and from the stream to the Book, with great regularity. I do not remember that he ever read the newspapers, or any other books than the Bible and the hymn-book. When he was over eighty years old he would woo the trout-streams with great success, and between times would pore over the Book till his eyes were dim. I do not think he ever joined the church, or ever made an open profession of religion, as was the wont in those days; but he had the religious nature which he nursed upon the Bible. When a mere boy, as I have before told you, he was a soldier under Washington, and when the War of 1812 broke out, and one of his sons was drafted, he was accepted and went in his stead. The half-wild, adventurous life of the soldier suited him better

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

than the humdrum of the farm. From him, as I have said, I get the dash of Celtic blood in my veins — that almost feminine sensibility and tinge of melancholy that, I think, shows in all my books. That emotional Celt, ineffectual in some ways, full of longings and impossible dreams, of quick and noisy anger, temporizing, revolutionary, mystical, bold in words, timid in action — surely that man is in me, and surely he comes from my revolutionary ancestor, Grandfather Kelly.

I think of the Burroughs branch of my ancestry as rather retiring, peace-loving, solitude-loving men — men not strongly sketched in on the canvas of life, not self-assertive, never roistering or uproarious — law-abiding, and church-going. I gather this impression from many sources, and think it is a correct one.

Oh, the old farm days! how the fragrance of them still lingers in my heart! the spring with its sugar-making and the general awakening about the farm, the returning birds, and the full, lucid trout-streams; the summer with its wild berries, its hay-ing, its cool, fragrant woods; the fall with its nuts, its game, its apple-gathering, its holidays; the winter with its school, its sport on ice and snow, its apple-bins in the cellar, its long nights by the fire-side, its voice of fox-hounds on the mountains, its

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

sound of flails in the barn — how much I still dream about these things!

But I am slow in keeping my promise to try to account for myself. Yet all these things are a part of my antecedents; they entered into my very blood — father and mother and brothers and sisters, and the homely life of the farm, all entered into and became a part of that which I am.

I am certain, as I have told you before, that I derived more from my mother than from my father. I have more of her disposition — her yearning, brooding nature, her subdued and neutral tones, her curiosity, her love of animals, and of wild nature generally. Father was neither a hunter nor a fisherman, and, I think, was rarely conscious of the beauty of nature around him. The texture of his nature was much less fine than that of Mother's, and he was a much easier problem to read; he was as transparent as glass. Mother had more of the stuff of poetry in her soul, and a deeper, if more obscure, background to her nature. That which makes a man a hunter or a fisherman simply sent her forth in quest of wild berries. What a berry-picker she was! How she would work to get the churning out of the way so she could go out to the berry lot! It seemed to heal and refresh her to go forth in the hill meadows for strawberries, or in the old bushy bark-peelings for raspberries. The last

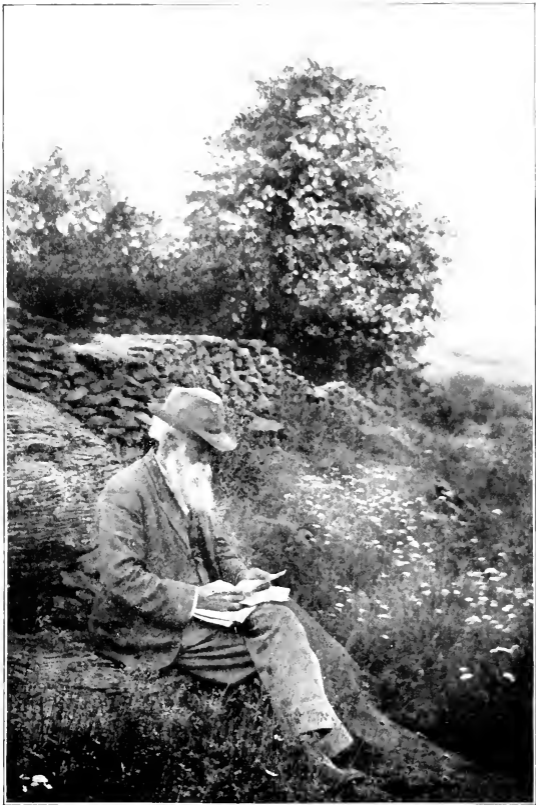
## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

work she did in the world was to gather a pail of blackberries as she returned one September afternoon from a visit to my sister's, less than a mile away.

I am as fond of going forth for berries as my mother was, even to this day. Every June I must still make one or two excursions to distant fields for wild strawberries, or along the borders of the woods for black raspberries, and I never go without thinking of Mother. You could not see all that I bring home with me in my pail on such occasions; if you could, you would see the traces of daisies and buttercups and bobolinks, and the blue skies, with thoughts of Mother and the Old Home, that date from my youth. I usually eat some of the berries in bread and milk, as I was wont to do in the old days, and am, for the moment, as near a boy again as it is possible for me to be.

No doubt my life as a farm boy has had much to do with my subsequent love of nature, and my feeling of kinship with all rural things. I feel at home with them; they are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. It seems to me a man who was not born and reared in the country can hardly get Nature into his blood, and establish such intimate and affectionate relations with her, as can the born countryman. We are so susceptible and so plastic in youth; we take things so seriously; they enter





ONE OF MR. BURROUGHS'S FAVORITE SEATS

7. 1977  
LIBRARY  
HENOX AND  
TIDEN FOUNDATIONS

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

into and color and feed the very currents of our being. As a child I think I must have been more than usually fluid and impressionable, and that my affiliations with open-air life and objects were very hearty and thorough. As I grow old I am experiencing what, I suppose, all men experience, more or less; my subsequent days slough off, or fade away, more and more, leaving only the days of my youth as a real and lasting possession.

When I began, in my twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year, to write about the birds, I found that I had only to unpack the memories of the farm boy within me to get at the main things about the common ones. I had unconsciously absorbed the knowledge that gave the life and warmth to my page. Take that farm boy out of my books, out of all the pages in which he is latent as well as visibly active, and you have robbed them of something vital and fundamental, you have taken from the soil much of its fertility. At least, so it seems to me, though in this business of self-analysis I know one may easily go far astray. It is probably quite impossible correctly to weigh and appraise the many and complex influences and elements that have entered into one's life.

When I look back to that twilight of early youth, to that half-mythical borderland of the age of six

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

or seven years, or even earlier, I can see but few things that, in the light of my subsequent life, have much significance. One is the impression made upon me by a redbird which the "hired girl" brought in from the woodpile one day with a pail of chips. She had found the bird lying dead upon the ground. That vivid bit of color in the form of a bird has never faded from my mind, though I could not have been more than three or four years old.

Another bird incident, equally vivid, I have related in "Wake-Robin," in the chapter called "The Invitation," — the vision of the small bluish bird with a white spot on its wing, one Sunday when I was six or seven years old, while roaming with my brothers in the "Deacon woods" near home. The memory of that bird stuck to me as a glimpse of a world of birds that I knew not of.

Still another bird incident that is stamped upon my memory must have occurred about the same time. Some of my brothers and an older boy neighbor and I were walking along a road in the woods when a brown bird flew down from a bush upon the ground in front of us. "A brown thrasher," the older boy said. It was doubtless either the veery, or the hermit thrush, and this was my first clear view of it. Thus it appears that birds stuck to me, impressed me from the first. Very early in my life the coming of the bluebird,

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

the phœbe, the song sparrow, and the robin, in the spring, were events that stirred my emotions, and gave a new color to the day. When I had found a bluebird's nest in the cavity of a stump or a tree, I used to try to capture the mother bird by approaching silently and clapping my hand over the hole; in this I sometimes succeeded, though, of course, I never harmed the bird. I used to capture song sparrows in a similar way, by clapping my hat over the nest in the side of the bank along the road.

I can see that I was early drawn to other forms of wild life, for I distinctly remember when a small urchin prying into the private affairs of the "peepers" in the marshes in early spring, sitting still a long time on a log in their midst, trying to spy out and catch them in the act of peeping. And this I succeeded in doing, discovering one piping from the top of a bulrush, to which he clung like a sailor to a mast; I finally allayed the fears of one I had captured till he sat in the palm of my hand and piped — a feat I have never been able to repeat since.

I studied the ways of the bumblebees also, and had names of my own for all the different kinds. One summer I made it a point to collect bumblebee honey, and I must have gathered a couple of pounds. I found it very palatable, though the combs were often infested with parasites. The small red-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

banded bumblebees that lived in large colonies in holes in the ground afforded me the largest yields. A large bee, with a broad light-yellow band, was the ugliest customer to deal with. It was a fighter and would stick to its enemy like grim death, following me across the meadow and often getting in my hair, and a few times up my trousers leg, where I had it at as great a disadvantage as it had me. It could stab, and I could pinch, and one blow followed the other pretty rapidly.

As a child I was always looked upon and spoken of as an "odd one" in the family, even by my parents. Strangers, and relatives from a distance, visiting at the house, would say, after looking us all over, "That is not your boy," referring to me, "who is he?" And I am sure I used to look the embarrassment I felt at not being as the others were. I did not want to be set apart from them or regarded as an outsider. As this was before the days of photography, there are no pictures of us as children, so I can form no opinion of how I differed in my looks from the others. I remember hearing my parents say that I showed more of the Kelly — Mother's family.

I early "took to larnin'," as Father used to say, differing from my brothers and sisters in this respect. I quickly and easily distanced them all in

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

the ordinary studies. I had gone through Dayball's Arithmetic while two of my older brothers were yet in addition. "Larnin'" came very hard to all of them except to Hiram and me, and Hiram did not have an easy time of it, though he got through his Dayball, and studied Greenleaf's Grammar.

There was a library of a couple of dozen of volumes in the district, and I used to take home books from it. They were usually books of travel or of adventure. I remember one, especially, a great favorite, "Murphy, the Indian Killer." I must have read this book several times. Novels, or nature books, or natural-history books, were unknown in that library. I remember the "Life of Washington," and I am quite certain that it was a passage in this book that made a lasting impression upon me when I was not more than six or seven years old. I remember the impression, though I do not recall the substance of the passage. The incident occurred one Sunday in summer when Hiram and a cousin of ours and I were playing through the house, I carrying this book in my hand. From time to time I would stop and read this passage aloud, and I can remember, as if it were but yesterday, that I was so moved by it, so swept away by its eloquence, that, for a moment, I was utterly oblivious to everything around me. I was lifted out of myself, caught up in a cloud of

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

feeling, and wafted I know not whither. My companions, being much older than I was, regarded not my reading.

These exalted emotional states, similar to that just described, used occasionally to come to me under other conditions about this time, or later. I recall one such, one summer morning when I was walking on the top of a stone wall that ran across the summit of one of those broad-backed hills which you yourself know. I had in my hand a bit of a root of a tree that was shaped much like a pistol. As I walked along the toppling stones, I flourished this, and called and shouted and exulted and let my enthusiasm have free swing. It was a moment of supreme happiness. I was literally intoxicated; with what I do not know. I only remember that life seemed amazingly beautiful — I was on the crest of some curious wave of emotion, and my soul sparkled and flashed in the sunlight. I have haunted that old stone wall many times since that day, but I have never been able again to experience that thrill of joy and triumph. The cup of life does not spontaneously bead and sparkle in this way except in youth, and probably with many people it does not even then. But I know from what you have told me that you have had the experience. When one is trying to cipher out his past, and separate the factors that have played an important



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

part in his life, such incidents, slight though they are, are significant.

The day-dreams I used to indulge in when twelve or thirteen, while at work about the farm, boiling sap in the spring woods, driving the cows to pasture, or hoeing corn, — dreams of great wealth and splendor, of dress and equipage, — were also significant, but not prophetic. Probably what started these golden dreams was an itinerant quack phrenologist who passed the night at our house when I was a lad of eight or nine. He examined the heads of all of us; when he struck mine, he grew enthusiastic. “This is the head for you,” he said; “this boy is going to be rich, very rich”; and much more to that effect. Riches was the one thing that appealed to country people in those times; it was what all were after, and what few had. Hence the confident prophesy of the old quack made an impression, and when I began to indulge in day-dreams I was, no doubt, influenced by it. But, as you know, it did not come true, except in a very limited sense. Instead of returning to the Old Home in a fine equipage, and shining with gold, — the observed of all observers, and the envy of all enviers, — as I had dreamed, and as had been foretold, I came back heavy-hearted, not indeed poor, but far from rich, walked up from the station through the mud and snow unnoticed, and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

took upon myself the debts against the old farm, and so provided that it be kept in the family. It was not an impressive home-coming; it was to assume burdens rather than to receive congratulations; it was to bow my head rather than to lift it up. Out of the golden dreams of youth had come cares and responsibilities. But doubtless it was best so. The love that brought me back to the old home year after year, that made me willing to serve my family, and that invested my native hills with such a charm, was the best kind of riches after all.

As a youth I never went to Sunday-school, and I was not often seen inside the church. My Sundays were spent rather roaming in the woods and fields, or climbing to "Old Clump," or, in summer, following the streams and swimming in the pools. Occasionally I went fishing, though this was to incur parental displeasure — unless I brought home some fine trout, in which case the displeasure was much tempered. I think this Sunday-school in the woods and fields was, in my case, best. It has always seemed, and still seems, as if I could be a little more intimate with Nature on Sunday than on a week-day; our relations were and are more ideal, a different spirit is abroad, the spirit of holiday and not of work, and I could in youth, and

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

can now, abandon myself to the wild life about me more fully and more joyously on that day than on any other.

The memory of my youthful Sundays is fragrant with wintergreens, black birch, and crinkle-root, to say nothing of the harvest apples that grew in our neighbor's orchard; and the memory of my Sundays in later years is fragrant with arbutus, and the showy orchid, and wild strawberries, and touched with the sanctity of woodland walks and hilltops. What day can compare with a Sunday to go to the waterfalls, or to "Piney Ridge," or to "Columbine Ledge," or to stroll along "Snake Lane"? What sweet peace and repose is over all! The snakes in Snake Lane are as free from venom as are grasshoppers, and the grasshoppers themselves fiddle and dance as at no other time. Cherish your Sundays. I think you will read a little deeper in "Nature's infinite book of secrecy" on Sunday than on Monday. I once began an essay the subject of which was Sunday, but never finished it. I must send you the fragment.

But I have not yet solved my equation — what sent me to nature? What made me take an intellectual interest in outdoor things? The precise value of the  $x$  is hard to find. My reading, no doubt, had much to do with it. This intellectual

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and emotional interest in nature is in the air in our time, and has been more or less for the past fifty years. I early read Wordsworth, and Emerson and Tennyson and Whitman, and Saint-Pierre's "Studies of Nature," as I have before told you. But the previous question is, why the nature poets and nature books appealed to me. One cannot corner this unknown quantity. I suppose I was simply made that way — the love of nature was born in me. I suppose Emerson influenced me most, beginning when I was about nineteen; I had read Pope and Thomson and Young and parts of Shakespeare before that, but they did not kindle this love of nature in me. Emerson did. Though he did not directly treat of outdoor themes, yet his spirit seemed to blend with Nature, and to reveal the ideal and spiritual values in her works. I think it was this, or something like it, that stimulated me and made bird and tree and sky and flower full of a new interest. It is not nature for its own sake that has mainly drawn me; had it been so, I should have turned out a strict man of science; but nature for the soul's sake — the inward world of ideals and emotions. It is this that allies me to the poets; while it is my interest in the mere fact that allies me to the men of science.

I do not read Emerson much now, except to try to get myself back into the atmosphere of that

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

foreworld when a paradox, or a startling affirmation, dissolved or put to flight a vast array of commonplace facts. What a bold front he did put on in the presence of the tyrannies of life! He stimulated us by a kind of heavenly bragging and saintly flouting of humdrum that ceases to impress us as we grow old. Do we outgrow him? — or do we fall away from him? I cannot bear to hear Emerson spoken of as a back-number, and I should like to believe that the young men of to-day find in him what I found in him fifty years ago, when he seemed to whet my appetite for high ideals by referring to that hunger that could “eat the solar system like gingercake.” But I suspect they do not. The world is too much with us. We are prone to hitch our wagon to a star in a way, or in a spirit, that does not sanctify the wagon, but debases the star. Emerson is perhaps too exceptional to take his place among the small band of the really first-class writers of the world. Shear him of his paradoxes, of his surprises, of his sudden inversions, of his taking sallies in the face of the common reason, and appraise him for his real mastery over the elements of life and of the mind, as we do Bacon, or Shakespeare, or Carlyle, and he will be found wanting. And yet, let me quickly add, there is something more precious and divine about him than about any or all the others. He prepares the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

way for a greater than he, prepares the mind to accept the new man, the new thought, as none other does.

But how slow I am in getting at my point! Emerson took me captive. For a time I lived and moved and had my intellectual being in him. I think I have always had a pretty soft shell, so to speak, hardly enough lime and grit in it, and at times I am aware that such is the fact to this day. Well, Emerson found my intellectual shell very plastic; I took the form of his mould at once, and could not get away from him; and, what is more, did not want to get away from him, did not see the need of getting away from him. Nature herself seemed to speak through him. An intense individuality that possesses the quality of loveliness is apt to impose itself upon us in this way. It was under this spell, as you know, that I wrote "Expression," of which I have told you. The "Atlantic," by the way, had from the first number been a sort of university to me. It had done much to stimulate and to shape my literary tastes and ambitions. I was so eager for it that when I expected it in the mail I used to run on my way to the post office for it. So, with fear and trembling, I sent that essay to its editor. Lowell told a Harvard student who was an old schoolmate of mine that when he read the

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

paper he thought some young fellow was trying to palm off an early essay of Emerson's upon him as his own, and that he looked through the "Dial" and other publications in the expectation of finding it. Not succeeding in doing so, he concluded the young man had written it himself. It was published in November, 1860, and as the contributors' names were not given at that time, it was ascribed to Emerson by the newspaper reviewers of that number. It went into Poole's Index as by Emerson, and later, Professor Hill,<sup>1</sup> of Harvard, quoted a line from it in a footnote in his "Rhetoric," and credited it to Emerson. So I had deceived the very elect. The essay had some merit, but it reeked with the Emersonian spirit and manner. When I came to view it through the perspective of print, I quickly saw that this kind of thing would not do for me. I must get on ground of my own. I must get this Emersonian musk out of my garments at all hazards. I concluded to bury my garments in the earth, as it were, and see what my native soil would do toward drawing it out. So I took to writing on all manner of rural themes —

<sup>1</sup> [Some years ago I took it upon myself to let Professor Hill know the real author of "Expression." He appeared grateful, though somewhat chagrined, and said the error should be corrected in the next edition. Mr. Burroughs smiled indulgently when he learned of my zeal in the matter: "Emerson's back is broad; he could have afforded to continue to shoulder my early blunders," he said. C. B.]

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

sugar-making, cows, haying, stone walls. These, no doubt, helped to draw out the rank suggestion of Emerson. I wrote about things of which I knew, and was, therefore, bound to be more sincere with myself than in writing upon the Emersonian themes. When a man tells what he knows, what he has seen or felt, he is pretty sure to be himself. When I wrote upon more purely intellectual themes, as I did about this time for the "Leader," the Emersonian influence was more potent, though less so than in the first "Atlantic" essay.

Any man progresses in the formation of a style of his own in proportion as he gets down to his own real thoughts and feelings, and ceases to echo the thoughts and moods of another. Only thus can he be sincere; and sincerity is the main secret of style. What I wrote from "the push of reading," as Whitman calls it, was largely an artificial product; I had not made it my own; but when I wrote of country scenes and experiences, I touched the quick of my mind, and it was more easy to be real and natural.

I also wrote in 1860 or 1861 a number of things for the "Saturday Press" which exhaled the Emersonian perfume. If you will look them over, you will see how my mind was working in the leading-strings of Analogy — often a forced and unreal Analogy.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

December, 1907. <sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIEND, —

You ask me to tell you more about myself, my life, how it has been with me, etc. It is an inviting subject. How an old man likes to run on about himself!

I see that my life has been more of a holiday than most persons', much more than was my father's or his father's. I have picnicked all along the way. I have on the whole been gay and satisfied. I have had no great crosses or burdens to bear; no great afflictions, except such as must come to all who live; neither poverty, nor riches. I have had uniform good health, true friends, and some congenial companions. I have done, for the most part, what I wanted to do. Some drudgery I have had, that is, in uncongenial work on the farm, in teaching, in clerking, and in bank-examining; but amid all these things I have kept an outlook, an open door, as it were, out into the free fields of nature, and a buoyant feeling that I would soon be there.

My farm life as a boy was at least a half-holiday. The fishing, the hunting, the berrying, the Sundays on the hills or in the woods, the sugar-making, the apple-gathering — all had a holiday character. But the hoeing corn, and picking up potatoes, and cleaning the cow stables, had little of this character. I have never been a cog in the wheel of any

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

great concern. I have never had to sink or lose my individuality. I have been under no exacting master or tyrant. . . . I have never been a slave to any bad habit, as smoking, drinking, over-feeding. I have had no social or political ambitions; society has not curtailed my freedom or dictated my dress or habits. Neither has any religious order or any clique. I have had no axe to grind. I have gone with such men and women as I liked, irrespective of any badge of wealth or reputation or social prestige that they might wear. I have looked for simple pleasures everywhere, and have found them. I have not sought for costly pleasures, and do not want them — pleasures that cost money, or health, or time. The great things, the precious things of my life, have been without money and without price, as common as the air.

Life has laid no urgent mission upon me. My gait has been a leisurely one. I am not bragging of it; I am only stating a fact. I have never felt called upon to reform the world. I have doubtless been culpably indifferent to its troubles and perplexities, and sins and sufferings. I lend a hand occasionally here and there in my own neighborhood, but I trouble myself very little about my neighbors — their salvation or their damnation. I go my own way and do my own work.

I have loved nature, I have loved the animals, I

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

have loved my fellow-men. I have made my own whatever was fair and of good report. I have loved the thoughts of the great thinkers and the poems of the great poets, and the devout lines of the great religious souls. I have not looked afar off for my joy and entertainment, but in things near at hand, that all may have on equal terms. I have been a loving and dutiful son, and a loving and dutiful father, and a good neighbor. I have got much satisfaction out of life; it has been worth while.

I have not been a burden-bearer; for shame be it said, perhaps, when there are so many burdens to be borne by some one. I have borne those that came in my way, or that circumstances put upon me, and have at least pulled my own weight. I have had my share of the holiday spirit; I have had a social holiday, a moral holiday, a business holiday. I have gone a-fishing while others were struggling and groaning and losing their souls in the great social or political or business maelstrom. I know, too, I have gone a-fishing while others have labored in the slums and given their lives to the betterment of their fellows. But I have been a good fisherman, and I should have made a poor missionary, or reformer, or leader of any crusade against sin and crime. I am not a fighter, I dislike any sort of contest, or squabble, or competition, or storm. My strength is in my calm, my serenity,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

my sunshine. In excitement I lose my head, and my heels, too. I cannot carry any citadel by storm. I lack the audacity and spirit of the stormer. I must reduce it slowly or steal it quietly. I lack moral courage, though I have plenty of physical and intellectual courage. I could champion Walt Whitman when nearly every contemporaneous critic and poet were crying him down, but I utterly lack the moral courage to put in print what he dared to. I have wielded the "big stick" against the nature-fakers, but I am very uncomfortable under any sort of blame or accusation. It is so much easier for me to say yes than no. My moral fibre is soft compared to my intellectual. I am a poor preacher, an awkward moralizer. A moral statement does not interest me unless it can be backed up by natural truth; it must have intellectual value. The religious dogmas interest me if I can find a scientific basis for them, otherwise not at all.

I shall shock you by telling you I am not much of a patriot. I have but little national pride. If we went to war with a foreign power to-morrow, my sympathies would be with the foreigner if I thought him in the right. I could gladly see our navy knocked to pieces by Japan, for instance, if we were in the wrong. I have absolutely no state pride, any more than I have county or town pride,

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

or neighborhood pride. But I make it up in family or tribal affection.

I am too much preoccupied, too much at home with myself, to feel any interest in many things that interest my fellows. I have aimed to live a sane, normal, healthy life; or, rather, I have an instinct for such a life. I love life, as such, and I am quickly conscious of anything that threatens to check its even flow. I want a full measure of it, and I want it as I do my spring water, clear and sweet and from the original sources. Hence I have always chafed in cities, I must live in the country. Life in the cities is like the water there — a long way from the original sources, and more or less tainted by artificial conditions.

The current of the lives of many persons, I think, is like a muddy stream. They lack the instinct for health, and hence do not know when the vital current is foul. They are never really well. They do not look out for personal inward sanitation. Smokers, drinkers, coffee-tiplers, gluttonous eaters, diners-out, are likely to lose the sense of perfect health, of a clear, pure life-current, of which I am thinking. The dew on the grass, the bloom on the grape, the sheen on the plumage, are suggestions of the health that is within the reach of most of us.

The least cloud or film in my mental skies mars or stops my work. I write with my body quite as

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

much as with my mind. How persons whose bread of life is heavy, so to speak, — no lightness or buoyancy or airiness at all, — can make good literature is a mystery to me; or those who stimulate themselves with drugs or alcohol or coffee. I would live so that I could get tipsy on a glass of water, or find a spur in a whiff of morning air.

Such as my books are, the bloom of my life is in them; no morbidity, or discontent, or ill health, or angry passion, has gone to their making. The iridescence of a bird's plumage, we are told, is not something extraneous; it is a prismatic effect. So the color in my books is not paint; it is health. It is probably nothing to brag of; much greater books have been the work of confirmed invalids. All I can say is that the minds of these inspired invalids have not seemed to sustain so close a relation to their bodies as my mind does to my body. Their powers seem to have been more purely psychic. Look at Stevenson — almost bedridden all his life, yet behold the felicity of his work! How completely his mind must have been emancipated from the infirmities of his body! It is clearly not thus with me. My mind is like a flame that depends entirely upon the good combustion going on in the body. Hence, I can never write in the afternoon, because this combustion is poorest then.

Life has been to me simply an opportunity to

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

learn and enjoy, and, through my books, to share my enjoyment with others. I have had no other ambition. I have thirsted to know things, and to make the most of them. The universe is to me a grand spectacle that fills me with awe and wonder and joy, and with intense curiosity. I have had no such religious burden to bear as my fathers did — the conviction of sin, the struggle, the agony, the despair of a soul that fears it is lost. The fear of hell has never troubled me. Of sin in the theological sense, the imputed sin of Adam's transgression, which so worried the old people, I have not had a moment's concern. That I have given my heart to Nature instead of to God, as these same old people would have said, has never cast a shadow over my mind or conscience — as if God would not get all that belonged to Him, and as if love of his works were not love of Him! I have acquiesced in things as they are, and have got all the satisfaction out of them that I could.

Over my personal sins and shortcomings, I have not been as much troubled as I should; none of us are. We do not see them in relief as others do; they are like the color of our eyes, or our hair, or the shapes of our noses.

I do not know that it is true that my moral fibre is actually weak. If I may draw a figure from geology, it is probably true that my moral quali-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

ties are the softer rock in the strata that make up my being — the easiest worn away. I see that I carry the instinct of the naturalist into all my activities. If a thing is natural, sane, wholesome, that is enough. Whether or not it is conventionally correct, or square with the popular conception of morality, does not matter to me.

I undoubtedly lack the heroic fibre. My edge is much easier turned than was that, say, of Thoreau. Austerity would ill become me. You would see through the disguise. Yes, there is much soft rock in my make-up. Is that why I shrink from the wear and tear of the world?

The religious storm and upheaval that I used to hear so much of in my youth is impossible with me. I am liable to deep-seated enthusiasms; but to nothing like a revolution in my inward life, nothing sudden, nothing violent. I can't say that there has been any abandonment of my opinions on important subjects; there has been new growth and evolution, I hope. The emphasis of life shifts, now here, now there; it is up hill and down dale, but there is no change of direction. . . . Certain deep-seated tendencies and instincts have borne me on. I have gravitated naturally to the things that were mine.

I could not make anything I chose of myself; I could only be what I am. In my youth I once



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

“went forward” at a “protracted meeting,” but nothing came of it. The change in me that I was told would happen did not happen, and I never went again. My nature was too equable, too self-poised, to be suddenly overturned and broken up.

I am not a bit gregarious. I cannot herd with other men and be “Hail, fellow, well met!” with them as I wish I could. I am much more at home with women; we seem to understand one another better. Put me with a lot of men, and we naturally separate as oil and water separate. On shipboard it is rarely that any of the men take to me, or I to them — I do not smoke or drink or tell stories, or talk business or politics, and the men have little use for me. On my last voyage across the Atlantic, the only man who seemed to notice me, or to whom I felt drawn at all, was a Catholic priest. Real countrymen, trappers, hunters, and farmers, I seem to draw near to. On the Harriman Alaskan Expedition the two men I felt most at home with were Fred Dellenbaugh, the artist and explorer, and Captain Kelly, the guide. Can you understand this? Do you see why men do not, as a rule, care for me, and why women do?

I accuse myself of want of sociability. Probably I am too thin-skinned. A little more of the pachyderm would help me in this respect.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

Some day I will give you more self-analysis and self-criticism.

I am what you might call an extemporaneous writer — I write without any previous study or preparation, save in so far as my actual life from day to day has prepared me for it. I do not work up my subject, or outline it, or sketch it in the rough. When I sit down to write upon any theme, like that of my "Cosmopolitan" article last April ["What Life Means to Me," 1906], or of my various papers on animal intelligence, I do not know what I have to say on the subject till I delve into my mind and see what I find there. The writing is like fishing or hunting, or sifting the sand for gold — I am never sure of what I shall find. All I want is a certain feeling, a bit of leaven, which I seem to refer to some place in my chest — not my heart, but to a point above that and nearer the centre of the chest — the place that always glows or suffuses when one thinks of any joy or good tidings that is coming his way. It is a kind of hunger for that subject; it warms me a little to think of it, a pleasant thrill runs through me; or it is something like a lover's feeling for his sweetheart — I long to be alone with it, and to give myself to it. I am sure I shall have a good time. Hence, my writing is the measure of my life. I can write only

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

about what I have previously felt and lived. I have no legerdemain to invoke things out of the air, or to make a dry branch bud and blossom before the eyes. I must look into my heart and write, or remain dumb. Robert Louis Stevenson said one should be able to write eloquently on a broomstick, and so *he* could. Stevenson had the true literary legerdemain; he was master of the art of writing; he could invest a broomstick with charm; if it remained a broomstick, it was one on which the witches might carry you through the air at night. Stevenson had no burden of meaning to deliver to the world; his subject never compelled him to write; but he certainly could invest common things and thoughts with rare grace and charm. I wish I had more of this gift, this facility of pen, apart from any personal interest in the subject. I could not grow eloquent over a broomstick, unless it was the stick of the broom that used to stand in the corner behind the door in the old kitchen at home — the broom with which Mother used to sweep the floor, and sweep off the doorstones, glancing up to the fields and hills as she finished and turned to go in; the broom with which we used to sweep the snow from our boots and trouser-legs when we came from school or from doing the chores in winter. Here would be a personal appeal that would probably find me more inevitably than it would Stevenson.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

I have never been in the habit of doing a thing, of taking a walk, or making an excursion, for the purpose of writing it up. Hence, when magazine editors have asked me to go South or to California, or here or there, to write the text to go with the pictures their artist would make, I have felt constrained to refuse. The thought that I was expected to write something would have burdened me and stood in the way of my enjoyment, and unless there is enjoyment, there is no writing with me.

I was once tempted into making an excursion for one of the magazines to a delightful place along the Jersey coast in company with an artist, and a memorable day it was, too, with plenty of natural and of human interest, but nothing came of it — my perverse pen would not do what it was expected to do; it was no longer a free pen.

When I began observing the birds, nothing was further from my thoughts than writing them up. I watched them and ran after them because I loved them and was happy with them in the fields and woods; the writing came as an afterthought, and as a desire to share my enjoyment with others. Hence, I have never carried a notebook, or collected data about nature in my rambles and excursions. What was mine, what I saw with love and emotion, has always fused with my mind, so that in the heat of

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

writing it came back to me spontaneously. What I have lived, I never lose.

My trip to Alaska came near being spoiled because I was expected to write it up, and actually did so from day to day, before fusion and absorption had really taken place. Hence my readers complain that they do not find me in that narrative, do not find my stamp or quality as in my other writings. And well they may say it. I am conscious that I am not there as in the others; the fruit was plucked before it had ripened; or, to use my favorite analogy, the bee did not carry the nectar long enough to transform it into honey. Had I experienced a more free and disinterested intercourse with Alaskan nature, with all the pores of my mind open, the result would certainly have been different. I might then, after the experience had lain and ripened in my mind for a year or two, and become my own, have got myself into it.

When I went to the Yellowstone National Park with President Roosevelt, I waited over three years before writing up the trip. I recall the President's asking me at the time if I took notes. I said, "No; everything that interests me will stick to me like a burr." And I may say here that I have put nothing in my writings at any time that did not interest me. I have aimed in this to please myself alone. I believe it to be true at all times that what

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

does not interest the writer will not interest his reader.

From the impromptu character of my writings come both their merits and their defects — their fresh, unstudied character, and their want of thoroughness and reference-book authority. I cannot, either in my writing or in my reading, tolerate any delay, any flagging of the interest, any beating about the bush, even if there is a bird in it. The thought, the description, must move right along, and I am impatient of all footnotes and quotations and asides.

A writer may easily take too much thought about his style, until it obtrudes itself upon the reader's attention. I would have my sentences appear as if they had never taken a moment's thought of themselves, nor stood before the study looking-glass an instant. In fact, the less a book appears written, the more like a spontaneous product it is, the better I like it. This is not a justification of carelessness or haste; it is a plea for directness, vitality, motion. Those writers who are like still-water fishermen, whose great virtues are patience and a tireless arm, never appealed to me any more than such fishing ever did. I want something more like a mountain brook — motion, variety, and the furthest possible remove from stagnation.

Indeed, where can you find a better symbol of

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

good style in literature than a mountain brook after it is well launched towards the lowlands — not too hurried, and not too loitering — limpid, musical, but not noisy, full but not turbid, sparkling but not frothy, every shallow quickly compensated for by a deep reach of thought; the calm, lucid pools of meaning alternating with the passages of rapid description, of moving eloquence or gay comment — flowing, caressing, battling, as the need may be, loitering at this point, hurrying at that, drawing together here, opening out there — freshness, variety, lucidity, power.

[We wish that, like the brook, our self-analyst would “go on forever”; but his stream of thought met some obstacle when he had written thus far, and I have never been able to induce it to resume its flow. I have, therefore, selected a bit of self-analysis from Mr. Burroughs’s diary of December, 1884, with which to close this subject. C.B.]

I have had to accomplish in myself the work of several generations. None of my ancestors were men or women of culture; they knew nothing of books. I have had to begin at the stump, and to rise from crude things. I have felt the disadvantages which I have labored under, as well as the advantages. The advantages are, that things were not hackneyed with me, curiosity was not blunted, my faculties were fresh and eager — a kind of virgin

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

soil that gives whatever charm and spontaneity my books possess, also whatever of seriousness and religiousness. The disadvantages are an inaptitude for scholarly things, a want of the steadiness and clearness of the tone of letters, the need of a great deal of experimenting, a certain thickness and indistinctness of accent. The farmer and laborer in me, many generations old, is a little embarrassed in the company of scholars; has to make a great effort to remember his learned manners and terms.

The unliterary basis is the best to start from; it is the virgin soil of the wilderness; but it is a good way to the college and the library, and much work must be done. I am near to nature and can write upon these themes with ease and success; this is my proper field, as I well know. But bookish themes — how I flounder about amid them, and have to work and delve long to get down to the real truth about them in my mind!

In writing upon Emerson, or Arnold, or Carlyle, I have to begin, as it were, and clear the soil, build a log hut, and so work up to the point of view that is not provincial, but more or less metropolitan.

My best gift as a writer is my gift for truth; I have a thoroughly honest mind, and know the truth when I see it. My humility, or modesty, or want of self-assertion, call it what you please, is also a help in bringing me to the truth. I am not



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

likely to stand in my own light; nor to mistake my own wants and whims for the decrees of the Eternal. At least, if I make the mistake to-day, I shall see my error to-morrow.

[The discerning reader can hardly fail to trace in the foregoing unvarnished account of our subject's ancestry and environment many of the factors which have contributed to the unique success he has attained as a writer. Nor can he fail to trace a certain likeness, of which our author seems unconscious, to his father. To his mother he has credited most of his gifts as a writer, but to that childlike unselfconsciousness which he describes in his father, we are doubtless largely indebted for the candid self-analysis here given.

But few writers could compass such a thing, yet he has done it simply and naturally, as he would write on any other topic in which he was genuinely interested. To be naked and unashamed is a condition lost by most of us long ago, but retained by a few who still have many of the traits of the natural man. C.B.]

## THE EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

**I** ONCE asked Mr. Burroughs about his early writings, his beginnings. He replied, "They were small potatoes and few in a hill, although at the time I evidently thought I was growing some big ones. I had yet to learn, as every young writer has to learn, that big words do not necessarily mean big thoughts." Later he sent me these maiden efforts, with an account of when and where they appeared.

[ These early articles show that Mr. Burroughs was a born essayist. They all took the essay form. In his reading, as he has said, any book of essays was pretty sure to arrest his attention. He seems early to have developed a hunger for the pure stuff of literature — something that would feed his intellect at the same time that it appealed to his æsthetic sense. Concerning his first essays, he wrote me: —

The only significant thing about my first essays, written between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, is their serious trend of thought; but the character of my early reading was serious and philosophical. Locke and Johnson and Saint-Pierre and the others no doubt left their marks upon me. I diligently held my mind down

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

to the grindstone of Locke's philosophy, and no doubt my mind was made brighter and sharper by the process. Out of Saint-Pierre's "Studies of Nature," a work I had never before heard of, I got something, though it would be hard for me to say just what. The work is a curious blending of such science as there was in his time, with sentiment and fancy, and enlivened by a bright French mind. I still look through it with interest, and find that it has a certain power of suggestion for me yet.

He confessed that he was somewhat imposed upon by Dr. Johnson's high-sounding platitudes. "A beginner," he said, "is very apt to feel that if he is going to write, the thing to do is to write, and get as far from the easy conversational manner as possible. Let your utterances be measured and stately." At first he tried to imitate Johnson, but soon gave that up. He was less drawn to Addison and Lamb at the time, because they were less formal, and seemingly less profound; and was slow in perceiving that the art of good writing is the art of bringing one's mind and soul face to face with that of the reader. How different that early attitude from the penetrating criticism running through his "Literary Values"; how different his stilted beginnings from his own limpid prose as we know it, to read which is to forget that one is reading!

Mr. Burroughs's very first appearance in print was in a paper in Delaware County, New York, —

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

the Bloomfield "Mirror," — on May 13, 1856. The article — "Vagaries *vs.* Spiritualism" — purports to be written by "Philomath," of Roxbury, New York, who is none other than John Burroughs, at the age of nineteen. It starts out showing impatience at the unreasoning credulity of the superstitious mind, and continues in a mildly derisive strain for about a column, foreshadowing the controversial spirit which Mr. Burroughs displayed many years later in taking to task the natural-history romancers. The production was evidently provoked by a too credulous writer on spiritualism in a previous issue of the "Mirror." I will quote its first paragraph: —

MR. MIRROR, — Notwithstanding the general diffusion of knowledge in the nineteenth century, it is a lamentable fact that some minds are so obscured by ignorance, or so blinded by superstition, as to rely with implicit confidence upon the validity of opinions which have no foundation in nature, or no support by the deductions of reason. But truth and error have always been at variance, and the audacity of the contest has kept pace with the growing vigor of the contending parties. Some straightforward, conscientious persons, whose intentions are undoubtedly commendable, are so infatuated by the sophistical theories of the spiritualist, or so tossed about on the waves of public opinion, that they lose sight of truth and good sense, and, like the philosopher who looked higher than was wise in his stargazing, tumble into a ditch.

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

In 1859 or 1860, Mr. Burroughs began to contribute to the columns of the "Saturday Press," an organ of the literary bohemians in New York, edited by Henry Clapp. These were fragmentary things of a philosophical cast, and were grouped under the absurd title "Fragments from the Table of an Intellectual Epicure," by "All Souls." There were about sixty of these fragments. I have examined most of them; some are fanciful and far-fetched; some are apt and felicitous; but all foreshadow the independent thinker and observer, and show that this "Intellectual Epicure" was feeding on strong meat and assimilating it.

I assume that it will interest the reader who knows Mr. Burroughs only as the practiced writer of the past fifty years to see some of his first sallies into literature, to trace the unlikeness to his present style, and the resemblances here and there. Accordingly I subjoin some extracts by "All Souls" from the time-stained pages of the New York "Saturday Press" of 1859 and 1860:—

A principle of absolute truth, pointed with fact and feathered with fancy, and shot from the bow-string of a master intellect, is one of the most potent things under the sun. It sings like a bird of peace to those who are not the object of its aim, but woe, woe to him who is the butt of such terrible archery!

For a thing to appear heavy to us, it is necessary that

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

we have left to balance against it; to appear strong, it is necessary that we have strength; to appear great, it is necessary that we have an idea of greatness. We must have a standard to measure by, and that standard must be in ourselves. An ignorant peasant cannot know that Bacon is so wise. To duly appreciate genius, you must have genius; a pigmy cannot measure the strength of a giant. The faculty that reads and admires, is the green undeveloped state of the faculty that writes and creates.

A book, a principle, an individual, a landscape, or any object in nature, to be understood and appreciated, must answer to something within us; appreciation is the first step toward interpreting a revelation.

To feel terribly beaten is a good sign; the more resources a man is conscious of, the deeper he will feel his defeat. But to feel unusually elated at a victory indicates that our strength did not warrant it, that we had gone beyond our resources. The boy who went crowing all day through the streets, on having killed a squirrel with a stone, showed plainly enough that it was not a general average of his throwing, and that he was not in the habit of doing so well; while the rifleman picks the hawk from the distant tree without remark or comment, and feels vexed if he miss.

The style of some authors, like the manners of some men, is so naked, so artificial, has so little character at the bottom of it, that it is constantly intruding itself upon your notice, and seems to lie there like a huge marble counter from behind which they vend only pins and needles; whereas the true function of style is as a means and not as an end — to concentrate the attention upon

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

the thought which it bears, and not upon itself — to be so apt, natural, and easy, and so in keeping with the character of the author, that, like the comb in the hive, it shall seem the result of that which it contains, and to exist for *its* sake alone.

It is interesting to note, in these and other extracts, how the young writer is constantly tracing the analogy between the facts of everyday life about him, and moral and intellectual truths. A little later he began to knit these fragments together into essays, and to send the essays to the "Saturday Press" under such titles as "Deep," and "A Thought on Culture." There is a good deal of stating the same thing in diverse ways. The writer seems to be led on and on to seek analogies which, for the most part, are felicitous; occasionally crudities and unnecessarily homely comparisons betray his unformed taste. The first three paragraphs of "Deep" give a fair sample of the essay:—

Deep authors? Yes, reader, I like deep authors, that is, authors of great penetration, reach, and compass of thought; but I must not be bored with a sense of depth — must not be required to strain my mental vision to see into the bottom of a well; the fountain must flow out at the surface, though it come from the centre of the globe. Then I can fill my cup without any artificial aid, or any painful effort.

What we call depth in a book is often obscurity; and an author whose meaning is got at only by severe mental

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

exertion, and a straining of the mind's eye, is generally weak in the backbone of him. Occasionally it is the dullness of the reader, but oftener the obtuseness of the writer.

A strong vigorous writer is not obscure — at any rate, not habitually so; never leaves his reader in doubt, or compels him to mount the lever and help to raise his burden; but clutches it in his mighty grasp and hurls it into the air, so that it is not only unencumbered by the soil that gave it birth, but is wholly detached and relieved, and set off against the clear blue of his imagination. His thought is not like a rock propped up but still sod-bound, but is like a rock held aloft, or built into a buttress, with definite shape and outline.

Let me next quote from "A Thought on Culture," which appeared in the same publication a little later, and which is the first to bear his signature: —

In the conduct of life a man should not show his knowledge, but his wisdom; not his money — that were vulgar and foolish — but the result of it — independence, courage, culture, generosity, manliness, and that noble, humane, courteous air which wealth always brings to the right sort of a man.

A display of mere knowledge, under most circumstances, is pedantry; an exercise of wisdom is always godlike. We cannot pardon the absence of knowledge, but itself must be hid. We can use a thing without absolutely showing it, we can be reasonable without boring people with our logic, and speak correctly without parsing our sentences.



## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

The end of knowledge is not that a man may appear learned, any more than the end of eating is that a man may seem to have a full stomach; but the end of it is that a man may be wise, see and understand things as they are; be able to adjust himself to the universe in which he is placed, and judge and reason with the celerity of instinct, and that without any conscious exercise of his knowledge. When we feel the food we have eaten, something is wrong; so when a man is forever conscious of his learning, he has not digested it, and it is an encumbrance. . . .

The evolution of this author in his use of titles is interesting. Compare the crudity of "Vagaries *vs.* Spiritualism," and "Deep," for example, with those he selects when he begins to publish his books. "Wake-Robin," "Winter Sunshine," "Locusts and Wild Honey," "Leaf and Tendril," — how much they connote! Then how felicitous are the titles of most of his essays! "Birch Browsings," "The Snow-Walkers," "Mellow England," "Our Rural Divinity" (the cow), "The Flight of the Eagle" (for one of his early essays on Whitman), "A Bunch of Herbs," "A Pinch of Salt," "The Divine Soil," "The Long Road" (on evolution) — these and many others will occur to the reader.

Following "A Thought on Culture" was a short essay on poetry, the drift of which is that poetry as contrasted with science must give us things, not as they are in themselves, but as they stand related

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

to our experience. Our young writer is more at his ease now: —

Science, of course, is literal, as it ought to be, but science is not life; science takes no note of this finer self, this duplicate on a higher scale. Science never laughs or cries, or whistles or sings, or falls in love, or sees aught but the coherent reality. It says a soap bubble is a soap bubble — a drop of water impregnated with oleate of potash or soda, and inflated with common air; but life says it is a crystal sphere, dipped in the rainbow, buoyant as hope, sensitive as the eye, with a power to make children dance for joy, and to bring youth into the look of the old. . . .

Who in his youth ever saw the swallow of natural history to be the twittering, joyous bird that built mud nests beneath his father's shed, and in the empty odorous barn? — that snapped the insects that flew up in his way when returning at twilight from the upland farm; and that filled his memory with such visions of summer when he first caught its note on some bright May morning, flying up the southern valley? Describe water, or a tree, in the language of exact science, or as they really are in and of themselves, and what person, schooled only in nature, would recognize them? Things must be given as they seem, as they stand represented in the mind. Objects arrange themselves in our memory, not according to the will, or any real quality in themselves, but as they affect our lives and stand to us in our unconscious moments. The hills we have dwelt among, the rocks and trees we have looked upon in all moods and feelings, that stood to us as the shore to the sea, and received a thousand impresses of what we lived and suffered, have

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

significance to us that is not accounted for by anything we can see or feel in them.

Here we see the youth of twenty-three setting forth a truth which he has sedulously followed in his own writing about nature, the following of which accounts so largely for the wide appeal his works have made.

Some time in 1860, Mr. Burroughs began to send essays to the New York "Leader," a weekly paper, the organ of Tammany Hall at that time. His first article was made up of three short essays — "World Growth," "New Ideas," and "Theory and Practice." Here beyond question is the writer we know:

The ideas that indicate the approach of a new era in history come like bluebirds in the spring, if you have ever noticed how that is. The bird at first seems a mere wandering voice in the air; you hear its carol on some bright morning in March, but are uncertain of its course or origin; it seems to come from some source you cannot divine; it falls like a drop of rain when no cloud is visible; you look and listen, but to no purpose. The weather changes, and it is not till a number of days that you hear the note again, or, maybe, see the bird darting from a stake in the fence, or flitting from one mullein-stalk to another. Its notes now become daily more frequent; the birds multiply; they sing less in the air and more when at rest; and their music is louder and more continuous, but less sweet and plaintive. Their boldness increases and soon you see them flitting with a saucy and inquiring air

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

about barns and outbuildings, peeping into dove-cots and stable windows, and prospecting for a place to nest. They wage war against robins, pick quarrels with swallows, and would forcibly appropriate their mud houses, seeming to doubt the right of every other bird to exist but themselves. But soon, as the season advances, domestic instincts predominate; they subside quietly into their natural places, and become peaceful members of the family of birds.

So the thoughts that indicate the approach of a new era in history at first seem to be mere disembodied, impersonal voices somewhere in the air; sweet and plaintive, half-sung and half-cried by some obscure and unknown poet. We know not whence they come, nor whither they tend. It is not a matter of sight or experience. They do not attach themselves to any person or place, and their longitude and latitude cannot be computed. But presently they become individualized and centre in some Erasmus, or obscure thinker, and from a voice in the air, become a living force on the earth. They multiply and seem contagious, and assume a thousand new forms. They grow quarrelsome and demonstrative, impudent and conceited, crowd themselves in where they have no right, and would fain demolish or appropriate every institution and appointment of society. But after a time they settle into their proper relations, incorporate themselves in the world, and become new sources of power and progress in history.

This quotation is especially significant, as it shows the writer's already keen observation of the birds, and his cleverness in appropriating these facts

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

of nature to his philosophical purpose. How neatly it is done! Readers of "Wake-Robin" will recognize a part of it in the matchless description of the bluebird which is found in the initial essay of that book.

In 1860, in the "Leader," there also appeared a long essay by Mr. Burroughs, "On Indirections." This has the most unity and flow of thought of any thus far. It is so good I should like to quote it all. Here are the opening paragraphs: —

The South American Indian who discovered the silver mines of Potosi by the turning up of a bush at the roots, which he had caught hold of to aid his ascent while pursuing a deer up a steep hill, represents very well how far intention and will are concerned in the grand results that flow from men's lives. Every schoolboy knows that many of the most valuable discoveries in science and art were accidental, or a kind of necessity, and sprang from causes that had no place in the forethought of the discoverer. The ostrich lays its eggs in the sand, and the sun hatches them; so man puts forth an effort and higher powers second him, and he finds himself the source of events that he had never conceived or meditated. Things are so intimately connected and so interdependent, the near and the remote are so closely related, and all parts of the universe are so mutually sympathetic, that it is impossible to tell what momentous secrets may lurk under the most trifling facts, or what grand and beautiful results may be attained through low and unimportant means. It seems that Nature delights in surprise, and in

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

underlying our careless existences with plans that are evermore to disclose themselves to us and stimulate us to new enterprise and research. The simplest act of life may discover a chain of cause and effect that binds together the most remote parts of the system. We are often nearest to truth in some unexpected moment, and may stumble upon that while in a careless mood which has eluded our most vigilant and untiring efforts. Men have seen deepest and farthest when they opened their eyes without any special aim, and a word or two carelessly dropped by a companion has revealed to me a truth that weeks of study had failed to compass. . . .

Nature will not be come at directly, but indirectly; all her ways are retiring and elusive, and she is more apt to reveal herself to her quiet, unobtrusive lover, than to her formal, ceremonious suitor. A man who goes out to admire the sunset, or to catch the spirit of field and grove, will very likely come back disappointed. A bird seldom sings when watched, and Nature is no coquette, and will not ogle and attitudinize when stared at. The farmer and traveler drink deepest of this cup, because it is always a surprise and comes without forethought or preparation. No insulation or entanglement takes place, and the soothing, medicinal influence of the fields and the wood takes possession of us as quietly as a dream, and before we know it we are living the life of the grass and the trees.

How unconsciously here he describes his own intercourse with Nature! And what an unusual production for a youth of twenty-three of such meagre educational advantages!

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS'

In 1862, in an essay on "Some of the Ways of Power," which appeared in the "Leader," he celebrated the beauty and completeness of nature's inexorable laws: —

There is an evident earnestness and seriousness in the meaning of things, and the laws that traverse nature and our own being are as fixed and inexorable, though, maybe, less instantaneous and immediate in their operation, as the principle of gravitation, and are as little disposed to pardon the violator or adjourn the day of adjudication.

There seems to be this terrible alternative put to every man on entering the world, *conquer or be conquered*. It is what the waves say to the swimmer, "Use me or drown"; what gravity says to the babe, "Use me or fall"; what the winds say to the sailor, "Use me or be wrecked"; what the passions say to every one of us, "Drive or be driven." Time in its dealings with us says plainly enough, "Here I am, your master or your servant." If we fail to make a good use of time, time will not fail to make a bad use of us. The miser does not use his money, so his money uses him; men do not govern their ambition, and so are governed by it. . . .

These considerations are valuable chiefly for their analogical import. They indicate a larger truth. Man grows by conquering his limitations — by subduing new territory and occupying it. He commences life on a very small capital; his force yet lies outside of him, scattered up and down in the world like his wealth — in rocks, in trees, in storms and flood, in dangers, in difficulties, in hardships, — in short, in whatever opposes his progress

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

and puts on a threatening front. The first difficulty overcome, the first victory gained, is so much added to his side of the scale — so much reinforcement of pure power.

I have said elsewhere that Mr. Burroughs has written himself into his books. We see him doing this in these early years; he was an earnest student of life at an age when most young men would have been far less seriously occupied. Difficulties and hardships were roundabout him, his force was, indeed, "scattered up and down in the world, in rocks and trees," in birds and flowers, and from these sources he was even then wresting the beginnings of his successful career.

It was in November, 1860, when twenty-three years of age, that he made his first appearance in the pages of the "Atlantic Monthly," in the essay "Expression," comments upon which by its author I have already quoted. At that time he was under the Emersonian spell of which he speaks in his autobiographical sketch. Other readers and lovers of Emerson had had similar experiences. Brownlee Brown, an "Atlantic" contributor (of "Genius" and "The Ideal Tendency," especially), was a "sort of refined and spiritualized Emerson, without the grip and gristle of the master, but very pleasing and suggestive," Mr. Burroughs says. The younger writer made a pilgrimage to the home of



## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

Brownlee Brown in the fall of 1862, having been much attracted to him by the above-named essays. He found him in a field gathering turnips. They had much interesting talk, and some correspondence thereafter. Mr. Brown admitted that his mind had been fertilized by the Emersonian pollen, and declared he could write in no other way.

Concerning his own imitation of Emerson, Mr. Burroughs says: —

It was by no means a conscious imitation. Had I tried to imitate him, probably the spurious character of my essay would have deceived no one. It was one of those unconscious imitations that so often give an impression of genuineness. . . . When I began to realize how deeply Emerson had set his stamp upon me, I said to myself: "This will never do. I must resist this influence. If I would be a true disciple of Emerson, I must be myself and not another. I must brace myself by his spirit, and not go tricked out in his manner, and his spirit was '*Never imitate.*'"

It was this resolution, as he has before told us, that turned him to writing on outdoor subjects.

In rereading "Expression" recently, I was struck, not so much by its Emersonian manner, as by its Bergsonian ideas. I had heard Mr. Burroughs, when he came under the spell of Bergson in the summer of 1911, say that the reason he was so moved by the French philosopher was

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

doubtless because he found in him so many of his own ideas; and it was with keen pleasure that I came upon these forerunners of Bergson written before Bergson was born.

At the time when Mr. Burroughs was dropping the Emersonian manner, and while his style was in the transition stage, he wrote an essay on "Analogy," and sent it also to the "Atlantic," receiving quite a damper on his enthusiasm when Lowell, the editor, returned it. But he sent it to the old "Knickerbocker Magazine," where it appeared in 1862. Many years later he rewrote it, and it was accepted by Horace Scudder, then the "Atlantic's" editor; in 1902, after rewriting it the second time, he published it in "Literary Values."

Because of the deep significance of them at this time in the career of Mr. Burroughs, I shall quote the following letters received by him from David A. Wasson, a Unitarian clergyman of Massachusetts, and a contributor to the early numbers of the "Atlantic." Their encouragement, their candor, their penetration, and their prescience entitle them to a high place in an attempt to trace the evolution of our author. One readily divines how much such appreciation and criticism meant to the youthful essayist.

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

GROVELAND, MASS., May 21, 1860.

MR. BURROUGHS, —

MY DEAR SIR, — Let me tell you at the outset that I have for five years suffered from a spinal hurt, from which I am now slowly recovering, but am still unable to walk more than a quarter of a mile or to write without much pain. I have all the will in the world to serve you, but, as you will perceive, must use much brevity in writing.

“Expression” I do not remember, — probably did not read, — for I read no periodical literature — not even the “Atlantic,” which is the best periodical I know — unless my attention is very especially called to it, and often, to tell the truth, do not heed the call when it is given. Where I am at present I have not access to back numbers of the “Atlantic,” but shall have soon. The essay that you sent me I read carefully twice, but unfortunately left it in Boston, where it reached me. I can therefore only speak of it generally. It certainly shows in you, if my judgment may be trusted, unusual gifts of pure intellect — unusual, I mean, among scholars and literary men; and the literary execution is creditable, though by no means of the same grade with the mental power evinced. You must become a fine literary worker to be equal to the demands of such an intellect as yours. For the deeper the thought, the more difficult to give it a clear and attractive expression. You *can* write so as to command attention. I am sure you can. Will you? that is the only question. Can you work and wait long enough? Have you the requisite patience and persistency? If you have, there is undoubtedly an honorable future before you.

But I will not conceal from you that I think you too

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

young to have written "numerous essays" of the class you attempt, or to publish a book consisting of such. No other kind of writing requires such mental maturity; stories may be written at any age, though good ones are seldom written early. Even poems and works of art have been produced by some Raphael or Milton at a comparatively early season of life, and have not given shame to the author at a later age; though this is the exception, not the rule. But the purely reflective essay belongs emphatically to maturer life. Your twenty-four years have evidently been worth more to you than the longest life to most men; but my judgment is that you should give your genius more time yet, and should wait upon it with more labor. This is my frank counsel. I will respect you so much as to offer it without disguise. Let me fortify it by an example or two. Mr. Emerson published nothing, I think, until he was past thirty, and his brother Charles, now dead, who was considered almost superior to him, maintained that it is almost a sin to go into print sooner. Yet both these had all possible educational advantages, and were familiar with the best books and the best results of American culture from infancy almost. I myself printed nothing — saving some poetical indiscretions — until I was twenty-seven, and this was only a criticism on Dr. Isaac Barrow — not a subject, you see, that made great demands upon me. Two years later an article on Lord Bacon, for which I had been indirectly preparing more than two years, and directly at least one; and even then I would say little respecting his philosophy, and confined myself chiefly to a portraiture of his character as a man. At thirty-two years of age I sent to press an essay similar in character to those I

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

write now — and am at present a little ashamed of it. I am now thirty-nine years old, and all that I have ever put in print would not make more than one hundred and thirty or one hundred and forty pages in the "Atlantic." Upon reflection, however, I will say two hundred pages, including pamphlet publications. I would have it less rather than more. But for this illness it would have been even less, for this has led me to postpone larger enterprises, which would have gone to press much later, and prepare shorter articles for the "Atlantic." Yet my literary interest began at a very early age.

In writing essays such as it seems to me you have a genius for, I require: —

1. That one should get the *range* — the largest range — of the laws he sets forth. This is the *sine qua non*. Every primary law goes through heaven and earth. Go with it. This is the business and privilege of intellect.

2. When one comes to writing, let his discourse have a beginning and an end. Do not let the end of his essay be merely the end of his sheet, or the place where he took a notion to stop writing, but let it be necessary. Each paragraph, too, should represent a distinct advance, a clear step, in the exposition of his thought. I spare no labor in securing this, and reckon no labor lost that brings me toward this mark. I reckon my work ill done if a single paragraph, yes, or a single sentence, can be transposed without injuring the whole.

3. Vivid expression must be sought, must be labored for unsparingly. This you, from your position, will find it somewhat hard to attain, unless you have peculiar aptitude for it. Expression in the country is far less vivacious than in cities.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

I have spoken frankly; now you must decide for yourself. You have mental power enough; if you have accessory qualities (which I think you must possess), you cannot fail to make your mark.

The brevity that I promised you will not find in this letter, but you will find haste enough to make up for the lack of it.

If now, after the foregoing, you feel any inclination to send me the essay on "Analogy" (capital subject), pray do so. I will read it, and if I have anything to say about it, will speak as frankly as above.

I shall be in this place — Groveland, Mass. — about three weeks; after that in Worcester a short while.

Very truly yours,

DAVID A. WASSON.

GROVELAND, MASS., June 18, 1862.

MR. BURROUGHS, —

MY DEAR SIR, — I am sorry to have detained your MS. so long, but part of the time I have been away, and during the other portion of it, the fatigue that I must undergo was all that my strength would bear.

I read your essay carefully in a few days after receiving it and laid it aside for a second perusal. Now I despair of finding time for such a second reading as I designed, and so must write you at once my impressions after a single reading.

The inference concerning your mind that I draw from your essay enhances the interest I previously felt in you. All that you tell me of yourself has the same effect. You certainly have high, very high, mental power; and the patience and persistency that you must have shown hitherto assures me that you will in future be equal to

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

the demands of your intellect. 'As to publishing what you have now written, you must judge. The main question is whether you will be discouraged by failure of your book. If not, publish, if you like; and then, if the public ignores your thought, gather up your strength again and write so that they cannot ignore you. For, in truth, the public does not like to think; it likes to be amused; and conceives a sort of hatred against the writer who would force it to the use of its intellect. This is invariably the case; it will be so with you. If the public finds anything in your work that can be condemned, it will be but too happy to pass sentence; if it can make out to think that you are a pretender, it will gladly do so; if it *can* turn its back upon you and ignore you, its back, and nothing else, you will surely see. And this on account of your merits. You really have thoughts. You make combinations of your own. You have freighted your words out of your own mental experience. You do not flatter any of the sects by using their cant. Now, then, be sure that you have got to do finished work, finished in every minutest particular, for years, before your claims will be allowed.

If you *were* a pretender, your success in immediate prospect would be more promising; the very difficulty is that you are not — that you think — that the public must read you *humbly*, confessing that you have intelligence beyond its own. I said that the general public wants to be amused: I now add that it dearly desires to be flattered, or at least allowed to flatter itself. Those people who have no thoughts of their own are the very ones who hate mortally to admit to themselves that any intelligence in the world is superior to their own. A noble nature is indeed never so delighted as

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

when it finds something that may be lawfully revered; but all the ignoble keep up their self-complacency by shutting their eyes to all superiority.

I state the case strongly, as you will feel it bye and bye. Mind, I am not a disappointed man; and have met as generous appreciation as I ought to wish. I am not misanthropic, nor in the least soured. I say all this, not *against* the public, but *for* you.

Now, then, as to the essay. It is rich in thought. Everywhere are the traces of a penetrating and sincere intellect. Much of the expression is also good. The faults of it, *me judice*, are as follows: The introduction I think too long. I should nearly throw away the first five pages. Your true beginning I think to be near the bottom of the sixth page, though the *island* in the middle paragraph of that page is too fine to be lost. From the sixth to about the twentieth I read with hearty pleasure. Then begin subordinate essays in illustration of your main theme. These are good in themselves, but their subordination is a little obscured. I think careless readers — and most of your readers, be sure, will be careless — will fail to perceive the connection. You are younger than I, and will hope more from your readers; but I find even superior men slow, *slow*, SLOW to understand — missing your point so often! I think the relationship must be brought out more strongly, and some very good sentences must be thrown out because they are more related to the subordinate than the commanding subject. This is about all that I have to say. Sometimes your sentences are a little heavy, but you will find, little by little, happier terms of expression. I do not in the least believe that you cannot in time write as well as I. What I have done to earn expression I know better



## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

than you! The crudities that I have outgrown or out-labored, I also know.

. You must be a little less careless about your spelling, simply because these slips will discredit your thought in the eyes of superficial critics.

You understand, of course, that I speak above of the general public — not of the finer natures, who will welcome you with warm hands.

I fear that the results of my reading will not correspond to your wishes, and that it was hardly worth your while to send me your MS. But I am obliged to you for informing me of your existence, for I augur good for my country from the discovery of every such intelligence as yours, and I pledge to you my warm interest and regard.

{ Very cordially yours,  
DAVID A. WASSON.

WORCESTER, Sept. 29, 1862.

MY DEAR MR. BURROUGHS, —

To the medicine proposition I say, Yes. A man of your tastes and mental vigor should be able to do some clean work in that profession. I know not of any other established profession that allows a larger scope of mind than this. There is some danger of materialism, but this you have already weaponed yourself against, and the scientific studies that come in the line of the profession will furnish material for thought and expression which I am sure you will know well how to use.

I am glad if my suggestions about your essay proved of some service to you. There is thought and statement in it which will certainly one day come to a market. The book, too, all in good season. Life for you is

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

very long, and you can take your time. Take it by all means. Give yourself large leisure to do your best.

I am about setting up my household gods in Worcester. This makes me in much haste, and therefore without another word I must say that I shall always be glad to hear from you, and that I am always truly your friend.

D. A. WASSON.

Of the early nature papers which Mr. Burroughs wrote for the New York "Leader," and which were grouped under the general title, "From the Back Country," there were five or six in number, of two or three columns each. One on "Butter-Making," of which I will quote the opening passage, fairly makes the mouth water:—

With green grass comes golden butter. With the bobolinks and the swallows, with singing groves, and musical winds, with June, — ah, yes! with tender, succulent, gorgeous June, — all things are blessed. The dairyman's heart rejoices, and the butter tray with its virgin treasure becomes a sight to behold. There lie the rich masses, fold upon fold, leaf upon leaf, fresh, sweet, and odorous, just as the ladle of the dairymaid dipped it from the churn, sweating great drops of buttermilk, and looking like some rare and precious ore. The cool spring water is the only clarifier needed to remove all dross and impurities and bring out all the virtues and beauties of this cream-evolved element. How firm and bright it becomes, how delicious the odor it emits! what vegetarian ever found it in his heart, or his palate

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

either, to repudiate butter? The essence of clover and grass and dandelions and beechen woods is here. How wonderful the chemistry that from elements so common and near at hand produces a result so beautiful and useful! Eureka! Is not this the alchemy that turns into gold the commonest substances? How can transformation be more perfect?

During the years of this early essay-writing, Mr. Burroughs was teaching country schools in the fall and winter, and working on the home farm in summer; at the same time he was reading serious books and preparing himself for whatever was in store for him. He read medicine for only three months, in the fall of 1862, and then resumed teaching. His first magazine article about the birds was written in the summer or fall of 1863, and appeared in the "Atlantic" in the spring of 1865. He learned from a friend to whom Mr. Sanborn had written that the article had pleased Emerson.

It was in 1864, while in the Currency Bureau in Washington, that he wrote the essays which make up his first nature book, "Wake-Robin." His first book, however, was not a nature book, but was "Walt Whitman as Poet and Person." It was published in 1867, preceding "Wake-Robin" by four years. It has long been out of print, and is less known than his extended, riper work, "Whitman, A Study," written in 1896.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

A record of the early writings of Mr. Burroughs would not be complete without considering also his ventures into the field of poetry. In the summer of 1860 he wrote and printed his first verses (with the exception of some still earlier ones written in 1856 to the sweetheart who became his wife), which were addressed to his friend and comrade E. M. Allen, subsequently the husband of Elizabeth Akers, the author of "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight." The lines to E. M. A. were printed in the "Saturday Press." Because they are the first of our author's verses to appear in print, I quote them here: —

### TO E. M. A.

A change has come over nature  
Since you and June were here;  
The sun has turned to the southward  
Adown the steps of the year.

The grass is ripe in the meadow,  
And the mowers swing in rhyme;  
The grain so green on the hillside  
Is in its golden prime.

No more the breath of the clover  
Is borne on every breeze,  
No more the eye of the daisy  
Is bright on meadow leas.

The bobolink and the swallow  
Have left for other clime —

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

They mind the sun when he beckons  
And go with summer's prime.

Buttercups that shone in the meadow  
Like rifts of golden snow,  
They, too, have melted and vanished  
Beneath the summer's glow.

Still at evenfall in the upland  
The vesper sparrow sings,  
And the brooklet in the pasture  
Still waves its glassy rings.

And the lake of fog to the southward  
With surges white as snow —  
Still at morn away in the distance  
I see it ebb and flow.

But a change has come over nature,  
The youth of the year has gone;  
A grace from the wood has departed,  
And a freshness from the dawn.

Another poem, "Loss and Gain," was printed in the New York "Independent" about the same time.

### LOSS AND GAIN

The ship that drops behind the rim  
Of sea and sky, so pale and dim,  
Still sails the seas  
With favored breeze,  
Where other waves chant ocean's hymn.

The wave that left this shore so wide,  
And led away the ebbing tide,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

Is with its host  
On fairer coast,  
Bedecked and plumed in all its pride.

The grub I found encased in clay  
When next I came had slipped away  
On golden wing,  
With birds that sing,  
To mount and soar in sunny day.

No thought or hope can e'er be lost —  
The spring will come in spite of frost.  
Go crop the branch  
Of maple stanch,  
The root will gain what you exhaust.

The man is formed as ground he tills —  
Decay and death lie 'neath his sills.  
The storm that beats,  
And solar heats,  
Have helped to form whereon he builds.

Successive crops that lived and grew,  
And drank the air, the light, the dew,  
And then deceased,  
His soil increased  
In strength, and depth, and richness, too.

From slow decay the ages grow,  
From blood and crime the centuries blow,  
What disappears  
Beneath the years,  
Will mount again as grain we sow.

These rather commonplace verses, the first showing his love for comrades, the others his phil-

osophical bent, were the forerunners of that poem of Mr. Burroughs's — "Waiting" — which has become a household treasure, often without the ones who cherish it knowing its source. "Waiting" was written in the fall of 1862. In response to my inquiry as to its genesis, its author said: —

I was reading medicine in the office of a country doctor at the time and was in a rather gloomy and discouraged state of mind. My outlook upon life was anything but encouraging. I was poor. I had no certain means of livelihood. I had married five years before, and, at a venture, I had turned to medicine as a likely solution of my life's problems. The Civil War was raging and that, too, disturbed me. It sounded a call of duty which increased my perturbations; yet something must have said to me, "Courage! all will yet be well. You are bound to have your own, whatever happens." Doubtless this feeling had been nurtured in me by the brave words of Emerson. At any rate, there in a little dingy back room of Dr. Hull's office, I paused in my study of anatomy and wrote "Waiting." I had at that time had some literary correspondence with David A. Wasson whose essays in the "Atlantic" I had read with deep interest. I sent him a copy of the poem. He spoke of it as a vigorous piece of work, but seemed to see no special merit in it. I then sent it to "Knickerbocker's Magazine," where it was printed, in December, I think, in 1862. It attracted no attention, and was almost forgotten by me till many years afterwards when it appeared in Whittier's "Songs of Three Centuries." This indorsement by Whittier gave it vogue. It began

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

to be copied by newspapers and religious journals, and it has been traveling on the wings of public print ever since. I do not think it has any great poetic merit. The secret of its success is its serious religious strain, or what people interpret as such. It embodies a very comfortable optimistic philosophy which it chants in a solemn, psalm-like voice. Its sincerity carries conviction. It voices absolute faith and trust in what, in the language of our fathers, would be called the ways of God with man. I have often told persons, when they have questioned me about the poem, that I came of the Old School Baptist stock, and that these verses show what form the old Calvinistic doctrine took in me.

Let me quote here the letter which Mr. Wasson wrote to the author of "Waiting," on receiving the first autograph copy of it ever written: —

WORCESTER, Dec. 22, 1862.

MR. BURROUGHS, —

MY DEAR SIR, — I beg your pardon a thousand times for having neglected so long to acknowledge the letter containing your vigorous verses. Excess of work, and then a dash of illness consequent upon this excess, must be my excuse — by your kind allowance.

The verses are vigorous and flowing, good in sentiment, and certainly worthy of being sent to "some paper," if you like to print them. On the other hand, they do not indicate to me that you have any special call to write verse. A man of your ability and fineness of structure must necessarily be enough of a poet not to fail altogether in use of the poetical form. But all that I know of you indicates a predominance of reflec-



tive intellect — a habit of mind quite foreign from the lyrical. I think it may be very good practice to compose in verse, as it exercises you in terse and rhythmical expression; but I question whether your vocation lies in that direction.

After all, you must not let anything which I, or any one, may say stand in your way, if you feel any clear leading of your genius in a given direction. What I have said is designed to guard you against an expenditure of power and hope in directions that may yield you but a partial harvest, when the same ought to be sown on more fruitful fields. I think you have unusual reflective power; and I am sure that in time you will find time and occasion for its exercise, and will accomplish some honorable tasks.

Very truly yours,

D. A. WASSON.

It may be fancy on my part, but I have a feeling that, all unconsciously to Mr. Burroughs, a sentence or two in Mr. Wasson's letter of September 29, 1862, had something to do with inspiring the mood of trustfulness and the attitude of waiting in serenity, which gave birth to this poem: —

. . . The book, too, all in good season. Life for you is very long, and you can take your time. Take it by all means. Give yourself large leisure to do your best.

Whether or not this is so, I am sure the sympathy and understanding of such a man as Mr. Wasson

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

was a godsend to our struggling writer, and was one of the most beautiful instances in his life of "his own" coming to him.

"Waiting" seems to have gone all over the world. It has been several times set to music, and its authorship has even been claimed by others. It has been parodied, more's the pity; and spurious stanzas have occasionally been appended to it; while an inferior stanza, which the author dropped years ago, is from time to time resurrected by certain insistent ones. Originally, it had seven stanzas; the sixth, discarded by its author, ran as follows: —

Yon flowret, nodding in the wind,  
Is ready plighted to the bee;  
And, maiden, why that look unkind?  
For, lo! thy lover seeketh thee.

This stanza is a detraction from the poem as we know it, and assuredly its author has a right to drop it. Concerning the fifth stanza, Mr. Burroughs says he has never liked it, and has often substituted one which he wrote a few years ago. The stanza he would reject is —

The waters know their own and draw  
The brook that springs in yonder heights;  
So flows the good with equal law  
Unto the soul of pure delights.

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS

The one he would offer instead —

The law of love binds every heart,  
And knits it to its utmost kin,  
Nor can our lives flow long apart  
From souls our secret souls would win.

And yet he is not satisfied with this; he says it is too subtle and lacks the large, simple imagery of the original lines.

The legion who cherish this poem in their hearts are justly incensed whenever they come across a copy of it to which some one, a few years ago, had the effrontery to add this inane stanza: —

Serene I fold my hands and wait,  
Whate'er the storms of life may be,  
Faith guides me up to heaven's gate,  
And love will bring my own to me.

One of Mr. Burroughs's friends (Joel Benton), himself a poet, in an article tracing the vicissitudes of this poem, shows pardonable indignation at the "impudence and hardihood of the unmannered meddler" who tacked on the "heaven's gate" stanza, and adds: —

The lyric as Burroughs wrote it embodies a motive, or concept, that has scarcely been surpassed for amenability to poetic treatment, and for touching and impressive point. Its partly elusive outlines add to its charm. Its balance between hint and affirmation; its faith in universal forces, and its tender yet virile expres-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

sion, are all shining qualities, apparent to the critical, and hypnotic to the general, reader. There is nothing in it that need even stop at "heaven's gate." It permits the deserving reader by happy instinct to go through that portal — without waiting outside to parade his sect mark. But the force of the poem and catholicity of its sanctions are either utterly destroyed or ridiculously enfeebled, by capping it with a sectarian and narrowly interpreted climax.

Although the poem is so well known, I shall quote it here in the form preferred by its author: —

### WAITING

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,  
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;  
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,  
For lo! my own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,  
For what avails this eager pace?  
I stand amid th' eternal ways,  
And what is mine shall know my face.

Asleep, awake, by night or day,  
The friends I seek are seeking me;  
No wind can drive my bark astray,  
Nor change the tide of destiny.

What matter if I stand alone?  
I wait with joy the coming years;  
My heart shall reap where it hath sown,  
And garner up its fruit of tears.

## EARLY WRITINGS OF JOHN BURROUGHS,

The waters know their own and draw  
The brook that springs in yonder heights;  
So flows the good with equal law  
Unto the soul of pure delights.

The stars come nightly to the sky,  
The tidal wave comes to the sea;  
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,  
Can keep my own away from me.

## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

COME and go to Slabsides for over Sunday — I think we can keep warm. We will have an old-fashioned time; I will roast a duck in the pot; it will be great fun.”

This invitation came from Mr. Burroughs in 1911 to friends who proposed to call on him early in December. Riverby was closed for the season, its occupants tarrying in Poughkeepsie, but, ever ready for an adventure, the Sage of Slabsides proposed a winter picnic at his cabin in the hills.

A ride of some two hours from New York brings us to West Park, where our host awaits us. A stranger, glancing at his white hair and beard, might credit his seventy-five years, but not when looking at his ruddy face with the keen, bright eyes, or at his alert, vigorous movements.

Together with blankets and a market-basket of provisions we are stowed away in a wagon and driven up the steep, winding way; at first along a country road, then into a wood's road with huge Silurian rocks cropping out everywhere, showing here and there seams of quartz and patches of moss and ferns.

## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

“In there,” said Mr. Burroughs, pointing to an obscure path, “I had a partridge for a neighbor. She had a nest there. I went to see her every day till she became uneasy about it, and let me know I was no longer welcome.”

“Yonder,” he continued, indicating a range of wooded hills against the wintry sky, “is the classic region of ‘Popple Town Hill,’ and over there is ‘Pang Yang.’”

Some friendly spirit has preceded us to the cabin; a fire is burning in the great stone fireplace, and mattresses and bedding are exposed to the heat. Moving these away, the host makes room for us near the hearth. He piles on the wood, and we are soon permeated by the warmth of the fire and of the unostentatious hospitality of Slabsides.

How good it is to be here! The city, with its rush and roar and complexities, seems far away. How satisfying it is to strip off the husks and get at the kernel of things! There is more chance for high thinking when one is big enough to have plain living. How we surround ourselves with non-essentials, how we are dominated with the “mania of owning things” — one feels all this afresh in looking around at this simple, well-built cabin with its few needful things close at hand, and with life reduced to the simplest terms. One sees here exemplified the creed Mr. Burroughs outlined

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

several years ago in his essay "An Outlook upon Life": —

I am bound to praise the simple life, because I have lived it and found it good. . . . I love a small house, plain clothes, simple living. Many persons know the luxury of a skin bath — a plunge in the pool or the wave unhampered by clothing. That is the simple life — direct and immediate contact with things, life with the false wrappings torn away — the fine house, the fine equipage, the expensive habits, all cut off. How free one feels, how good the elements taste, how close one gets to them, how they fit one's body and one's soul! To see the fire that warms you, or better yet, to cut the wood that feeds the fire that warms you; to see the spring where the water bubbles up that slakes your thirst, and to dip your pail into it; to see the beams that are the stay of your four walls, and the timbers that uphold the roof that shelters you; to be in direct and personal contact with the sources of your material life; to want no extras, no shields; to find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter; to find a quest of wild berries more satisfying than a gift of tropic fruit; to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest, or over a wild flower in spring — these are some of the rewards of the simple life.

The two men were soon talking companionably. When persons of wide reading and reflection, and of philosophic bent, who have lived long and been mellowed by life, come together, the interchange





THE LIVING-ROOM, SLABSIDES



## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

of thought is bound to be valuable; things are so well said, so inevitably said, that the listener thinks he cannot forget the manner of saying; but thoughts crowd thick and fast, comments on men and measures, on books and events, are numerous and varied, but hard to recapture. The logs ignite, sending out their cheering heat, the coals glow, the sparks fly upward, warmth and radiance envelop us; but an attempt to warm the reader by the glow of that fireside talk is almost as futile as an effort to dispel to-day's cold by the fire of yesterday.

A few deserted cottages perched on the rocks near by show us where the summer neighbors of our host live, but at all seasons his wild neighbors are the ones he hobnobs with the most; while his indoor companions are Montaigne, Sainte-Beuve, Carlyle, Arnold, Wordsworth, Darwin, Huxley, Emerson, Whitman, Bergson, and many others, ancient and modern.

"I've been rereading Emerson's essay on 'Immortality' lately, evenings in my study down there by the river," said Mr. Burroughs. "I had forgotten it was so noble and fine—he makes much of the idea of permanence."

In this connection he spoke of John Fiske and his contributions to literature, telling of the surprise he felt on first meeting Fiske at Harvard, to see the look of the *bon vivant* in one in whom the in-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

tellectual and the spiritual were so prominent. Laughing, he recalled the amusement of the college boys at Fiske's comical efforts to discover a piece of chalk dropped during his lecture on "Immortality." Standing on the hearth, a merry twinkle in his eyes, he recited some humorous lines which he had written concerning the episode.

Reverting to the question of immortality in a serious vein, he summed up the debated question much as he has done in one of his essays, — that it has been good to be here, and will be good to go hence; that we know not whence we come, nor whither we go; were not consulted as to our coming, and shall not be as to our going; but that it is all good; all for "the glory of God;" though we must use this phrase in a larger sense than the cramped interpretation of the theologian. All the teeming life of the globe, the millions on millions in the microscopic world, and the millions on millions of creatures that can be seen by the naked eye — those who have been swept away, those here now, those who will come after — all appearing in their appointed time and place, playing their parts and vanishing, and to the old question "Why?" we may as well answer, "For the glory of God"; if we will only conceive a big enough glory, and a big enough God. His utter trust in

## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

things as they are seemed a living embodiment of that sublime line in "Waiting" —

"I stand amid the Eternal ways";

and, thus standing, he is content to let the powers that be have their way with him.

"To all these mysteries I fall back upon the last words I heard Whitman say, shortly before the end — commonplace words, but they sum it up: 'It's all right, John, it's all right'; but Whitman had the active, sustaining faith in immortality —

'I laugh at what you call dissolution,  
And I know the amplitude of time.'

As the afternoon wanes, Mr. Burroughs hangs the kettle on the crane, broils the chops, and with a little help from one of the guests, soon has supper on the table, a discussion of Bergson's philosophy suffering only occasional interruptions; such as, "Where *have* those women [summer occupants of Slabsides] put my holder?" or, "See if there is n't some salt in the cupboard."

"There! I forgot to bring up eggs for breakfast, but here are other things," he mutters as he rummages in his market-basket. "That memory of mine is pretty tricky; sometimes I can't remember things any better than I can find them when they are right under my nose. I've just found a line from Emerson that I've been hunting for two

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

days — ‘The worm striving to be man.’ I looked my Emerson through and through, and no worm; then I found in Joel Benton’s Concordance of Emerson that the line was in ‘May-Day’; he even cited the page, but my Emerson had no printing on that page. I searched all through ‘May-Day,’ and still no worm; I looked again with no better success, and was on the point of giving up when I spied the worm — it almost escaped me —”

“It must have turned, did n’t it?”

“Yes, the worm surely turned, or I never should have seen it,” he confessed.

The feminine member of the trio wields the dish-mop while the host dries the dishes, and the Dreamer before the fire luxuriates in the thought that his help is not needed.

The talk on philosophy and religion does not make the host forget to warm sheets and blankets and put hot bricks in the beds to insure against the fast-gathering cold.

The firelight flickers on the bark-covered rafters, lighting up the yellow-birch partition between living-room and bedroom downstairs, and plays upon the rustic stairway that leads to the two rooms overhead, as we sit before the hearth in quiet talk. Outside the moonlight floods the great open space around the cabin, revealing outlines of

## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

the rocky inclosure. No sounds in all that stillness without, and within only the low voices of the friends, and the singing logs.

Mr. Burroughs tells of his visit, in October, to the graves of his maternal grandparents: —

“They died in 1854, my first season away from home, and there they have lain for fifty-seven years, and I had never been to their graves! I’m glad I went; it made them live again for me. How plainly I could see the little man in his blue coat with brass buttons, with his decidedly Irish features! And Grandmother, a stout woman, with quaint, homely ways. The moss is on their grave-stones now, and two evergreen trees wax strong above them. I found an indigo-bird had built her nest above their graves. I broke off the branch and brought it home.”

“There! get up and use that water before it freezes over,” the host calls out the next morning, as, mounting the stairs, he places a pitcher of hot water by the door. It is bitter cold, one’s fingers ache, and one wonders if, after all, it is so much fun to live in a cabin in the woods in the dead of winter. But a crackling fire below and savory smells of bacon and coffee reconcile one, and the day begins right merrily.

And what a dinner the author sets before us!

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

what fun to see him prepare it, discussing meanwhile the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, recounting anecdotes of boyhood, touching on politics and religion, on current events, on conflicting views of the vitalists and the chemico-physicists, on this and on that, but never to the detriment of his duck. It is true he did serenely fold his hands and wait, between times. Then what an event to see him lift the smoking cover and try the bird with a fork — “to see if the duck is relenting,” he explains. At a certain time he arises from a grave psychological discussion to rake out hollow places in the coals where he buries potatoes and onions.

“The baking of an onion,” he declares, “takes all the conceit out of him. He is sweet and humble after his baptism of fire.” Then the talk soars above ducks and onions, until he gives one of the idlers permission to prepare the salad and lay the table.

For a dinner to remember all one's days, commend me to a thoroughly relented duck; a mealy, ash-baked potato; an onion (yea, several of them) devoid of conceit, and well buttered and salted; and a salad of Slabsides celery and lettuce; with Riverby apples and pears, and beechnuts to complete the feast — beechnuts gathered in October up in the Catskills, gathered one by one as the



## A WINTER DAY AT SLABSIDES

chipmunk gathers them, by the "Laird of Woodchuck Lodge," as he is called on his native heath, though he is one and the same with the master of Slabsides.

We hear no sounds all the day outside the cabin but the merry calls of chickadees, until in mid-afternoon an unwelcome "Halloa!" tells us the wagon is come to take us down to Riverby. Reluctantly the fire is extinguished, and the wide, hospitable door of Slabsides closes behind us.

Riverby, "the house that Jack built," as the builder boasted, is a house interesting and individual, though conforming somewhat to the conventions of the time when it was built (1874). It is as immaculate within as its presiding genius can make it, presenting a sharp contrast to the easy-going housekeeping of the mountain cabin.

i We tarry a few minutes in the little bark-covered study, detached from the house and overlooking the Hudson, where Mr. Burroughs does his writing when at home; we see the rustic summer-house near by, and the Riverby vineyards, formerly husbanded by "the Vine-Dresser of Esopus," as his friends used to call him; now by his son Julian, who combines, like his father before him, grape-growing with essay-writing.

A pleasant hour is spent in the artistic little cottage, planned and built by the author and his son,

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

where live Mr. Julian Burroughs and his family. Here the grandfather has many a frolic with his three grandchildren, who know him as "Baba." John Burroughs the younger is his special pride. Who knows but the naturalist stands somewhat in awe of his grandson? — for as the youngster reaches for his "Teddy," and says sententiously, "Bear!" the elder never ventures a word about the dangers of "sham natural history."

Boarding the West Shore train, laden with fruit and bechnuts and pleasant memories, we return to the city's roar and whirl, dreaming still of the calls of chickadees in the bare woods and of quiet hours before the fire at Slabsides.

## BACK TO PEPACTION

**T**H**ERE** has always been a haunting suggestiveness to me about the expression *Rue du Temps Perdu* — the Street of Lost Time. Down this shadowy vista we all come to peer with tear-dimmed eyes sooner or later. Usually this pensive retrospection is the premonitory sign that one is nearing the last milestone before the downhill side of life begins. But to some this yearning backward glance comes early; they feel its compelling power while still in the vigor of middle life. Why this is so it is not easy to say, but imaginative, brooding natures who live much in their emotions are prone to this chronic homesickness for the Past, this ever-recurring, mournful retrospect, this tender, wistful gaze into the years that are no more.

It is this tendency in us all as we grow older that makes us drift back to the scenes of our youth; it satisfies a deep-seated want to look again upon the once familiar places. We seek them out with an eagerness wholly wanting in ordinary pursuits. The face of the fields, the hills, the streams, the house where one was born — how they are invested with something that exists nowhere else, wander where we will! In their midst memories come crowding thick and fast; things of moment, critical

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

episodes, are mingled with the most trivial happenings; smiles and tears and sighs are curiously blended as we stroll down the Street of Lost Time.

While we are all more or less under this spell of the Past, some natures are more particularly enthralled by it, even in the very zenith of life, showing it to be of temperamental origin rather than the outcome of the passing years. Of such a temperament is John Burroughs. Now, when the snows of five-and-seventy winters have whitened his head, we do not wonder when we hear him say, "Ah! the Past! the Past has such a hold on me!" But even before middle life he experienced this yearning, even then confessed that he had for many years viewed everything in the light of the afternoon's sun — "a little faded and diluted, and with a pensive tinge." "It almost amounts to a disease," he reflects, "this homesickness which home cannot cure — a strange complaint. Sometimes when away from the old scenes it seems as if I must go back to them, as if I should find the old contentment and satisfaction there in the circle of the hills. But I know I should not — the soul's thirst can never be slaked. My hunger is the hunger of the imagination. Bring all my dead back again, and place me amid them in the old home, and a vague longing and regret would still possess me."

## BACK TO PEPACTON

As early as his forty-fifth birthday he wrote in his journal: "Indeed, the Past begins to grow at my back like a great pack, and it seems as if it would overwhelm me quite before I get to be really an old man. As time passes, the world becomes more and more a Golgotha, — a place of graves, — even if one does not actually lose by death his friends and kindred. The days do not merely pass, we bury them; they are of us, like us, and in them we bury our own image, a real part of ourselves."

Perhaps, among the poems of Mr. Burroughs, next to "Waiting" the verses that have the most universal appeal are those of —

### THE RETURN

He sought the old scenes with eager feet —  
The scenes he had known as a boy;  
"Oh, for a draught of those fountains sweet,  
And a taste of that vanished joy!"

He roamed the fields, he wooed the streams,  
His school-boy paths essayed to trace;  
The orchard ways recalled his dreams,  
The hills were like his mother's face.

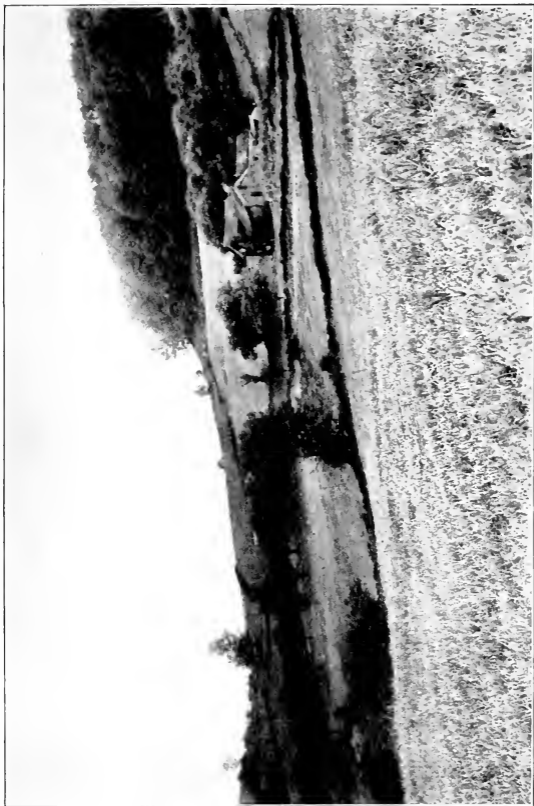
Oh, sad, sad hills! Oh, cold, cold hearth!  
In sorrow he learned this truth —  
One may return to the place of his birth,  
He cannot go back to his youth.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

But a half-loaf is better than no bread, and Mr. Burroughs has now yielded to this deep-seated longing for his boyhood scenes, and has gone back to the place of his birth amid the Catskills; and one who sees him there during the midsummer days — alert, energetic, curious concerning the life about him — is almost inclined to think he has literally gone back to his youth as well, for the boy in him is always coming to the surface.

It was on the watershed of the Pepacton (the East Branch of the Delaware), in the town of Roxbury, Delaware County, New York, that John Burroughs was born, and there that he gathered much of the harvest of his earlier books; it was there also that most of his more recent books were written. Although he left the old scenes in his youth, his heart has always been there. He went back many years ago and named one of his books (“Pepacton”) from the old stream, and he has now gone back and arranged for himself a simple summer home on the farm where he first saw the light.

Most of his readers have heard much of Slab-sides, the cabin in the wooded hills back of the Hudson, and of his conventional home, Riverby, at West Park, New York; but as yet the public has heard little of his more remote retreat on his native heath.



WOODCHUCK LODGE AND BARN





## BACK TO PEPACTON

For several years it has been his custom to slip away to the old home in Delaware County on one pretext or another — to boil sap in the old sugar bush and rejoice in the April frolic of the robins; to meander up Montgomery Hollow for trout; to gather wild strawberries in the June meadows and hobnob with the bobolinks; to saunter in the hemlocks in quest of old friends in the tree-tops; and—yes, truth compels me to confess — to sit in the fields with rifle in hand and wage war against the burrowing woodchuck which is such a menace to the clover and vegetables of the farmer.

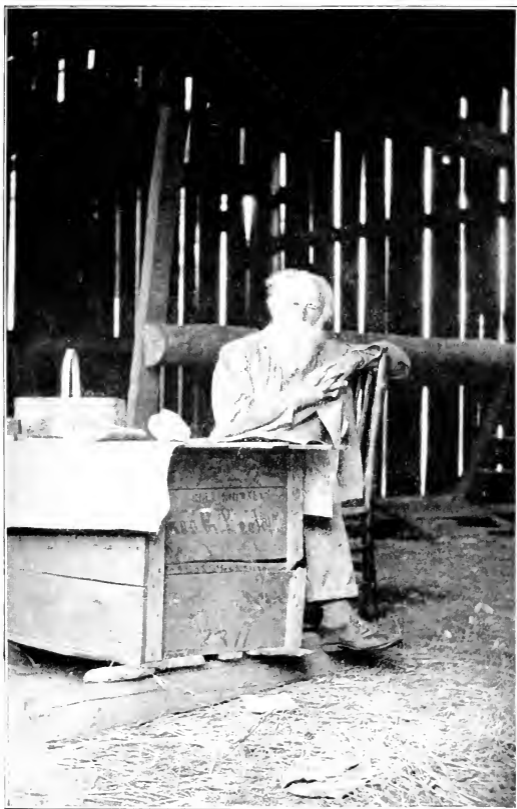
In the summer of 1908, Mr. Burroughs rescued an old dwelling fast going to decay which stood on the farm a half-mile from the Burroughs homestead, and there, with friends, camped out for a few weeks, calling the place, because of the neighbors who most frequented it, "Camp Monax," or, in homelier language, "Woodchuck Lodge." In the succeeding summers he has spent most of his time there. Though repairing and adding many improvements, he has preserved the simple, primitive character of the old house, has built a roomy veranda across its front, made tables, bookcases, and other furniture of simple rustic character, and there in summer he dwells with a few friends, as contented and serene a man as can be found in this complicated world of to-day. There his old friends

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

seek him out, and new ones come to greet him. Artists and sculptors paint and model him, and photographers carry away souvenirs of their pilgrimages.

In order to withdraw himself completely during his working hours from the domestic life, Mr. Burroughs instituted a study in the hay-barn, a few rods up the hill from the house. A rough box, the top of which is covered with manilla paper, an old hickory chair, and a hammock constitute his furnishings. The hay carpet and overflowing hay-mows yield a fragrance most acceptable to him, and through the great doorway he looks out upon the unfrequented road and up to Old Clump, the mountain in the lap of which his father's farm is cradled, the mountain which he used to climb to salt the sheep, the mountain which is the haunt of the hermit thrush. (His nieces and nephews at the old home always speak of this songster as "Uncle John's bird.")

As I watched Mr. Burroughs start out morning after morning with his market-basket of manuscripts on his arm, and briskly walk to his rude study, I asked myself, "Is there another literary man anywhere, now that Tolstoy has gone, who is so absolutely simple and unostentatious in tastes and practice as is John Burroughs?" How he has learned to strip away the husks and get at the



MR. BURROUGHS IN THE HAY-BARN STUDY  
WOODCHUCK LODGE



## BACK TO PEPACTION

kernels! How superbly he ignores non-essentials! how free he is from the tyranny of things! There in the comfort of the hills among which his life began, with his friends around him, he rejoices in the ever-changing face of Nature, enjoys the fruits of his garden, his forenoons of work, and the afternoons when friends from near and far walk across the fields, or drive, or motor up to Woodchuck Lodge; and best of all, he enjoys the peace that evening brings — those late afternoon hours when the shadow of Old Clump is thrown on the broad mountain-slope across the valley, and when the long, silvery notes of the vesper sparrow chant “Peace, goodwill, and then good-night.” As the shadows deepen, he is wont to carry his Victor out to the stone wall and let the music from Brahms’s “Cradle Song” or Schubert’s “Serenade” float to us as we sit on the veranda, hushed into humble gratitude for our share in this quiet life.

To see Mr. Burroughs daily amid these scenes; to realize how they are a part of him, and how inimitably he has transferred them to his books; to roam over the pastures, follow the spring paths, linger by the stone walls he helped to build, sit with him on the big rock in the meadow where as a boy he sat and dreamed; to see him in the everyday life — hoeing in the garden, tiptoeing about the house preparing breakfast while his guests are

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

lazily dozing on the veranda; to eat his corn-cakes, or the rice-flour pudding with its wild strawberry accompaniment; to see him rocking his grandson in the old blue cradle in which he himself was rocked; to picnic in the beech woods with him, climb toward Old Clump at sunset and catch the far-away notes of the hermit; to loll in the hammocks under the apple trees, or to sit in the glow of the Franklin stove of a cool September evening while he and other philosophic or scientific friends discuss weighty themes; to hear his sane, wise, and often humorous comments on the daily papers, and his absolutely independent criticism of books and magazines — to witness and experience all this, and more, is to enjoy a privilege so rare that I feel selfish unless I try to share it, in a measure, with less fortunate friends of Our Friend.

It has been my good fortune to spend many delightful summers with Mr. Burroughs at his old home, and also at Woodchuck Lodge. On my first visit he led me to a hilltop and pointed off toward a deep gorge where the Pepacton, although it is a placid stream near Roxbury, rises amid scenery wild and rugged. It drains this high pastoral country, where the farms hang upon the mountainsides or lie across the long, sloping hills. The look of those farms impressed me as the fields of England impressed Mr. Burroughs — “as though upon



CRADLE IN WHICH JOHN BURROUGHS WAS ROCKED





## BACK TO PEPACTON

them had settled an atmosphere of ripe and loving husbandry." I was often reminded in looking upon them of that line of Emerson's: "The day, immeasurably long, sleeps over the wide, warm fields." There is a fresh, blue, cleansed appearance to the hills, "like a newly-washed lamp chimney," as Mr. Burroughs sometimes said.

Our writer's overmastering attachment to his birthplace seems due largely to the fact that the springs, the hills, and the wooded mountains are inextricably blended with his parents and his youth. As he has somewhere said, "One's own landscape comes in time to be a sort of outlying part of him; he has sown himself broadcast upon it . . . planted himself in the fields, builded himself in the stone walls, and evoked the sympathy of the hills in his struggle."

From a hilltop he pointed off to the west and said, "Yonder is the direction that my grandparents came, in the 1790's, from Stamford, cutting a road through the woods, and there, over Batavia Hill, Father rode when he went courting Mother."

Then we went up the tansy-bordered road, past the little graveyard, and over to the site where his grandfather's first house stood. As we wandered about the old stone foundations, his reminiscences were interrupted by the discovery of a junco's nest.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS'

On the way back he pointed across the wide valley to the West Settlement schoolhouse where he and his brothers used to go, although his first school was in a little stone building which is still standing on the outskirts of [Roxbury, and known thereabouts as "the old stone jug." Mr. Burroughs remembers his first day in this school, and the little suit he wore, of bluish striped cotton, with epaulets on the shoulders which flopped when he ran. He fell asleep one day and tumbled off the seat, cutting his head; he was carried to a neighboring farmhouse, and he still vividly recalls the smell of camphor which pervaded the room when he regained consciousness. He was about four years of age. He remembers learning his "A-b ab's," as they were called, and just how the column of letters looked in the old spelling-book; remembers sitting on the floor under the desks and being called out once in a while to say his letters: "Hen Meeker, a boy bigger than I was, stuck on *e*. I can remember the teacher saying to him: 'And you can't tell that? Why, little Johnny Burroughs can tell you what it is. Come, Johnny.' And I crawled out and went up and said it was *e*, like a little man."

Up the hill a short distance from the old homestead he indicated the "turn 'n the road," as it passes by the "Deacon Woods"; this, he said,

## BACK TO PEPACTON

was his first journey into the world. He was about four years old when, running away, he got as far as this turn; then, looking back and seeing how far he was from the house, he became frightened and ran back crying. "I have seen a young robin," he added, "do the very same thing on its first journey from the nest."

"One of my earliest recollections," he said, "is that of lying on the hearth one evening to catch crickets that Mother said ate holes in our stockings — big, light-colored, long-legged house crickets, with long horns; one would jump a long way.

"Another early recollection comes to me: one summer day, when I was three or four years old, on looking skyward, I saw a great hawk sailing round in big circles. I was suddenly seized with a panic of fear and hid behind the stone wall.

"The very earliest recollection of my life is that of the 'hired girl' throwing my cap down the steps, and as I stood there crying, I looked up on the side-hill and saw Father with a bag slung across his shoulders, striding across the furrows sowing grain. It was a warm spring day, and as I looked hillward wistfully, I wished Father would come down and punish the girl for throwing my cap down the stairs — little insignificant things, but how they stick in the memory!"

"I see myself as a little boy rocking this cradle,"

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

said Mr. Burroughs, as he indicated the quaint blue wooden cradle (which I had found in rummaging through the attic at the old home, and had installed in Woodchuck Lodge), "or minding the baby while Mother bakes or mends or spins. I hear her singing; I see Father pushing on the work of the farm."

Most of the soil in Delaware County is decomposed old red sandstone. Speaking of this soil Mr. Burroughs said, "In the spring when the plough has turned the turf, I have seen the breasts of these broad hills glow like the breasts of robins." He is fond of studying the geology of the region now. I have seen him dig away the earth the better to expose the old glacier tracings, and then explain to his grandchildren how the glaciers ages ago made the marks on the rocks. To me one of the finest passages in his recent book "Time and Change" is one wherein he describes the look of repose and serenity of his native hills, "as if the fret and fever of life were long since passed with them." It is a passage in which he looks at his home hills through the eye of the geologist, but with the vision of the poet — the inner eye which assuredly yields him "the bliss of solitude."

One evening as we sat in the kitchen at the old home, he described the corn-shelling of the olden days: "I see the great splint basket with the long

## BACK TO PEPACTION

frying-pan handle thrust through its ears across the top, held down by two chairs on either end, and two of my brothers sitting in the chairs and scraping the ears of corn against the iron. I hear the kernels rattle, a shower of them falling in the basket, with now and then one flying out in the room. With the cobs that lie in a pile beside the basket I build houses, carrying them up till they topple, or till one of the shellers knocks them over. Mother is sitting by, sewing, her tallow dip hung on the back of a chair. Winter reigns without. How it all comes up before me!"

He remembers when four or five years old crying over a thing which had caused him deep chagrin: A larger boy — "the meanest boy I ever knew, and he became the meanest man," he said with spirit — "found me sulking under a tree in the corner of the school-yard; he bribed me with a slate pencil into confessing what I was crying about, but as soon as I had told him, he ran away with the pencil, shouting my secret to the other boys."

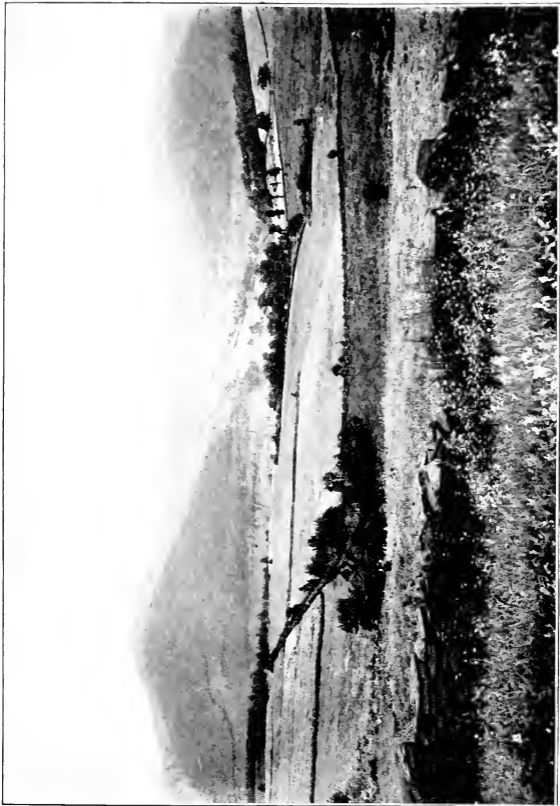
One day we went 'cross lots after spearmint for jelly for the table at Woodchuck Lodge, and an abandoned house near the mint-patches recalled to Mr. Burroughs the first time he had heard the word "taste" used, except in reference to food. The woman who had lived in this house, while

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

calling at his home and seeing his attempt at drawing something, had said, "What taste that boy has!" "It made me open my eyes — 'taste'! — then there was another kind of taste than the one I knew about — the taste of things I ate!"

At a place in the road near the old stone school-house, he showed me where, as a lad of thirteen, perhaps, he had stopped to watch some men working the road, and had first heard the word "antiquities" used. "They had uncovered and removed a large flat stone, and under it were other stones, probably arranged by the hands of earlier roadmakers. David Corbin, a man who had had some schooling, said, as they exposed the earlier layers, 'Ah! here are antiquities!' The word made a lasting impression on me."

One of our favorite walks at sunset was up the hill beyond the old home where the road winds around a neglected graveyard. From this high vantage-ground one can see two of the Catskill giants — Double Top and Mount Graham. It was not a favorite walk of the boy John Burroughs. He told how, even in his early teens, at dusk, he would tiptoe around the corner past the graveyard, afraid to run for fear a gang of ghosts would be at his heels. "When I got down the road a ways, though, how I would run!" He was always "scairy" if he had to come along the edge of the woods alone



VIEW OF THE CATSKILLS FROM WOODCHUCK LODGE

1917  
1918  
1919  
1920  
1921  
1922  
1923  
1924  
1925  
1926  
1927  
1928  
1929  
1930  
1931  
1932  
1933  
1934  
1935  
1936  
1937  
1938  
1939  
1940  
1941  
1942  
1943  
1944  
1945  
1946  
1947  
1948  
1949  
1950  
1951  
1952  
1953  
1954  
1955  
1956  
1957  
1958  
1959  
1960  
1961  
1962  
1963  
1964  
1965  
1966  
1967  
1968  
1969  
1970  
1971  
1972  
1973  
1974  
1975  
1976  
1977  
1978  
1979  
1980  
1981  
1982  
1983  
1984  
1985  
1986  
1987  
1988  
1989  
1990  
1991  
1992  
1993  
1994  
1995  
1996  
1997  
1998  
1999  
2000  
2001  
2002  
2003  
2004  
2005  
2006  
2007  
2008  
2009  
2010  
2011  
2012  
2013  
2014  
2015  
2016  
2017  
2018  
2019  
2020  
2021  
2022  
2023  
2024  
2025



## BACK TO PEPACTION

at nightfall, and was even afraid of the big black hole under the barn in the daytime: "I was tortured with the thought of what might lurk there in that great black abyss, and would hustle through my work of cleaning the stable, working like Hercules, and often sending in 'Cuff,' the dog, to scare 'em out."

Fed on stories of ghosts and hobgoblins in childhood, his active, sensitive imagination became an easy prey to these fears. But we do outgrow some things. In the summer of 1911 this grown-up boy waxed so bold that he sat in the barn with its black hole underneath and wrote of "The Phantoms Behind Us." There was still something Herculean in his task; he looked boldly down into the black abysms of Time, not without some shrinking, it is true, saw the "huge first Nothing," faced the spectres as they rose before him, wrestled with them, and triumphantly conquered by acknowledging each phantom as a friendly power — a creature on whose shoulders he had raised himself to higher and higher levels; he saw that though the blackness was peopled with uncouth and gigantic forms, out of all these there at last arose the being Man, who could put all creatures under his feet.

Along the road between the old home and Woodchuck Lodge are some rocks which were the "giant

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

stairs" of his childhood. On these he played, and he is fond now of pausing and resting there as he recalls events of those days.

"Are these rocks very old?" some one asked him one day.

"Oh, yes; they've been here since Adam was a kitten."

Whichever way he turns, memories of early days awaken; as he himself has somewhere said in print, "there is a deposit of him all over the landscape where he has lived."

As we have learned, Mr. Burroughs seems to have been more alive than his brothers and playmates, to have had wider interests and activities. When, a lad, he saw his first warbler in the "Deacon Woods," the black-throated blue-back, he was excited and curious as to what the strange bird could be (so like a visitant from another clime it seemed); the other boys met his queries with indifference, but for him it was the event of the day; it was far more, it was the keynote to all his days; it opened his eyes to the life about him — here, right in the "Deacon Woods," were such exquisite creatures! It fired him with a desire to find out about them. That tiny flitting warbler! How far its little wings have carried it! What an influence it has had on American literature, and on the lives

## BACK TO PEPACTION

of readers for the past fifty years, sending them to nature, opening their eyes to the beauty that is common and near at hand! One feels like thanking the Giver of all good that a little barefoot boy noted the warbler that spring day as it flitted about in the beechen wood. Life has been sweeter and richer because of it.

Down the road a piece is the place where this boy made a miniature sawmill, sawing cucumbers for logs. On this very rock where we sit he used to catch the flying grasshoppers early of an August morning — “the big brown fellows that fly like birds”; they would congregate here during the night to avail themselves of the warmth of the rocks, and here he would stop on his way from driving the cows to pasture, and catch them napping.

Yonder in the field by a stone wall, under a maple which is no longer standing, in his early twenties he read Schlegel’s “Philosophy of History,” one of the volumes which, when a youth, he had found in an old bookstall in New York, on the occasion of his first trip there.

“Off there through what we used to call the ‘Long Woods’ lies the road along which Father used to travel in the autumn when he took his butter to Catskill, fifty miles away. Each boy went in turn. When it came my turn to go, I was

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

in a great state of excitement for a week beforehand, for fear my clothes would not be ready, or else it would be too cold, or that the world would come to an end before the time of starting. Perched high on a spring-seat, I made the journey and saw more sights and wonders than I have ever seen on a journey since."

On the drive up from the village he showed me the place, a mile or more from their haunts on the breezy mountain lands, where the sheep were driven annually to be washed. It was a deep pool then, and a gristmill stood near by. He said he could see now the huddled sheep, and the overhanging rocks with the phœbes' nests in the crevices.

"Down in the Hollow," as they call the village of Roxbury, he drew my attention to the building which was once the old academy, and where he had his dream of going to school. He remembers as a lad of thirteen going down to the village one evening to hear a man, McLaurie, talk up the academy before there was one in Roxbury. "I remember it as if it were yesterday; a few of the leading men of the village were there. I was the only boy. I've wondered since what possessed me to go. In his talk the man spoke of what a blessing it would be to boys of that vicinity, pointing me out and saying, 'Now, like that boy, there.' I

## BACK TO PEPACTION

recall how I dropped my head and blushed. He was a small man, very much in earnest. When I heard of his death a few years ago, it gave me long, long thoughts. He finally got the academy going, taught it, and had a successful school there for several years, but I never got there. The school in the West Settlement, Father thought, was good enough for me. But my desire to go, and dreaming of it, impressed it and him upon me more, perhaps, than the boys who really went were impressed. How outside of it all I felt when I used to go down there to the school exhibitions! It was after that that I had my dream of going to Harpersfield Seminary — the very name had a romantic sound. Though Father had promised me I might go, when the time came he could n't afford it; he did n't mean to go back on his word, but there was very little money — I wonder how they got along so well as they did with so little."

"As a boy it had been instilled into my mind that God would strike one dead for mocking him. One day Ras Jenkins and I were crossing this field when it began to thunder. Ras turned up his lips to the clouds contemptuously. 'Oh, don't, you'll be struck,' I cried, cringing in expectation of the avenging thunderbolt. What a revelation it was when he was not struck! I immediately began to think, 'Now, maybe God is n't so easily offended

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

as I thought'; but it seemed to me any God with dignity ought to have been offended by such an act."

Mr. Burroughs showed me the old rosebush in the pasture, all that was left to mark the site where a house had once stood; even before his boyhood days this house had become a thing of the past. The roses, though, had always been a joy to him, and had played such a part in his early days that he had transplanted some of the old bush to a spot near his doorsteps at Slabsides. Once when he sent me some of the roses he wrote of them thus: "The roses of my boyhood! Take the first barefooted country lad you see with home-made linen trousers and shirt, and ragged straw hat, and put some of these roses in his hand, and you see me as I was fifty-five years ago. They are the identical roses, mind you. Sometime I will show you the bush in the old pasture where they grew."

One day we followed the course he and his brothers and sisters used to take on their way to school. Leaving the highway near the old graveyard, we went down across a meadow, then through a beech wood, and on through the pastures in the valley along which a trout brook used to flow, on across more meadows and past where a neglected orchard was, till we came to where the little old schoolhouse itself stood.

## BACK TO PEPACTON

How these trout streams used to lure him to play hookey! All the summer noonings, too, were spent there. He spoke feelingly of the one that coursed through the hemlocks — “loitering, log-impeded, losing itself in the dusky, fragrant depths of the hemlocks.” They used to play hookey down at Stratton Falls, too, and get the green streaks in the old red sandstone rocks to make slate pencils of, trying them on their teeth to make sure they were soft enough not to scratch their slates. The woods have been greatly mutilated in which they used to loiter on the way to school and gather crinkle-root to eat with their lunches, — though they usually ate it all up before lunch-time came, he said. In one of his books Mr. Burroughs speaks of a schoolmate who, when dying, said, “I must hurry, I have a long way to go over a hill and through a wood, and it is getting dark.” This was his brother Wilson, and he doubtless had in mind this very course they used to take in going to school.

This school (where Jay Gould was his playmate) he attended only until he was twelve years of age. A rather curious reciprocal help these two lads gave each other — especially curious in the light of their subsequent careers as writer and financier. The boy John Burroughs was one day feeling very uncomfortable because he could not furnish a

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

composition required of him. Eight lines only were sufficient if the task was completed on time, but the time was up and no line was written. This meant being kept after school to write twelve lines. In this extremity, Jay Gould came to his rescue with the following doggerel:—

“Time is flying past,  
Night is coming fast,  
I, minus two, as you all know,  
But what is more  
I must hand o’er  
Twelve lines by night,  
Or stay and write.  
Just eight I’ve got  
But you know that’s not  
Enough lacking four,  
But to have twelve  
It wants no more.”

“I have never been able to make out what the third line meant,” said Mr. Burroughs. A few years later, when Jay Gould was hard up (he had left school and was making a map of Delaware County), John Burroughs helped him out by buying two old books of him, paying him eighty cents. The books were a German grammar and Gray’s “Elements of Geology.” The embryo financier was glad to get the cash, and the embryo writer unquestionably felt the richer in possessing the books.



## BACK TO PEPACTON

Mr. Burroughs loves to look off toward Montgomery Hollow and talk of the old haunt. "I've taken many a fine string of trout from that stream," he would say. One day he and his brother Curtis and I drove over there and fished the stream, and he could hardly stay in the wagon the last half-mile. "Is n't it time to get out now, Curtis?" he fidgeted every little while. "Not yet, John, — not yet," said the more phlegmatic brother. But it was August, and although the rapid mountain brook seemed just the place for trout, the trout were not in their places. I shall long remember the enticing stream, the pretty cascades, the high shelving rocks sheltering the mossy nest of the phoebe, and the glowing masses of bee-balm blooming beside the stream; yes, and the eagerness of one of the fishermen as he slipped along ahead of me, dropping his hook into the pools. Occasionally he would relinquish the rod, putting it into my hands with a rare self-denial as we came to a promising pool; but I was more deft at gathering bee-balm than taking trout, and willingly spared the rod to the eager angler. And even he secured only two troutling to carry back in his mint-lined creel.

"Trout streams gurgled about the roots of my family tree," he was wont to say as he told of his grandfather Kelly's ardor for the pastime. One

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

day, in crossing the fields near the old home, he showed me the stone wall where he and his grandfather tarried the last time they went fishing together, he a boy of ten and his grandfather past eighty. As they rested on the wall, the old man, without noticing it, sat on the lad's hand as it lay on the wall. "It hurt," Mr. Burroughs said, "but I did n't move till he got ready to get up."

It was a great pleasure to go through the old sap bush with Mr. Burroughs, for there he always lives over again the days in early spring when sugar-making was in progress. He showed where some of the old trees once stood, — the grandmother trees, — and mourned that they were no more; but some of the mighty maples of his boyhood are still standing, and each recalls youthful experiences. He sometimes goes back there now in early spring to re-create the idyllic days. Their ways of boiling sap are different now, and he finds less poetry in the process. But the look of the old trees, the laugh of the robins, and the soft nasal calls of the nuthatch, he says, are the same as in the old times. "How these sounds ignore the years!" he exclaimed as a nuthatch piped in the near-by trees.

Sometimes he would bring over to Woodchuck Lodge from the homestead a cake of maple sugar from the veteran trees, and some of the maple-

## BACK TO PEPACTON

sugar cookies such as his mother used to make; though he eats sparingly of sweets nowadays. Yet, when he and a small boy would clear the table and take the food down cellar, it was no uncommon thing to see them emerge from the stairway, each munching one of those fat cookies, their eyes twinkling at the thought that they had found the forbidden sweets we had hidden so carefully.

He and this lad of eleven were great chums; they chased wild bees together, putting honey on the stone wall, getting a line on the bees; shelled beechnuts and cracked butternuts for the chipmunks; caught skunks in a trap, just to demonstrate that a skunk can be carried by the tail with impunity, if you only do it right (and, though succeeding one day, got the worst of the bargain the next); and waged war early and late on the flabby woodchucks which one could see almost any hour in the day undulating across the fields. We called these boys "John of Woods," and "John of Woodchucks"; and it was sometimes difficult to say which was the veriest boy, the one of eleven or the one of seventy-four.

One morning I heard them laughing gleefully together as they were doing up the breakfast work. Calling out to learn the cause of their merriment, I found the elder John had forgotten to eat his egg — he had just found it in his coat-pocket, having

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

put it in there to carry from the kitchen to the living-room.

He often amused us by his recital of Thackeray's absurd "Little Billee," and by the application of some of the lines to events in the life at Woodchuck Lodge.

As the evenings grew longer and cooler, we would gather about the table and Mr. Burroughs would read aloud, sometimes from Bergson's "Creative Evolution," under the spell of which he was the entire summer of 1911, sometimes from Wordsworth, sometimes from Whitman. "No other English poet has touched me quite so closely," he said, "as Wordsworth. . . . But his poetry has more the character of a message, and a message special and personal, to a comparatively small circle of readers." As he read "The Poet's Epitaph" one evening, I was impressed with the strong likeness the portrait there drawn has to Mr. Burroughs:—

"The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie  
Some random truths he can impart,—  
The harvest of a quiet eye  
That broods and sleeps on his own heart."



LIVING-ROOM, WOODCHUCK LODGE, WITH RUSTIC FURNITURE MADE BY MR. FURROUGHS

LIBRARY  
ARTHUR L. LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## BACK TO PEPACTON

What are the books, and notably the later philosophical essays, of Mr. Burroughs but the "harvest of a quiet eye"? His "Summit of the Years," his "Gospel of Nature" (which one of his friends calls "The Gospel according to Saint John"), his "Noon of Science," his "Long Road"? And most of this rich harvest he has gathered in his journeys back to Pepacton, inspired by the scenes amid which he first felt the desire to write.

Seeing him daily in these scenes, one feels that it may, indeed, be said of him as Matthew Arnold said of Sophocles, that he sees life steadily, and sees it whole. What a masterly handling is his of the facts of the universe, giving his reader the truths of the scientist touched with an idealism such as is only known to the poet's soul! A friend, writing me of "The Summit of the Years," spoke of "its splendid ascent by a rapid crescendo from the personal to the cosmic," and of how gratifying it is to see our author putting forth such fine work in his advancing years. Another friend called it "a beautiful record of a beautiful life." I recall the September morning on which he began that essay. He had written the first sentence — "The longer I live, the more I am impressed with the beauty and the wonder of the world" — when he was interrupted for a time. He spoke of what he had written, and said he hardly knew what he was going to

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

make of it. Later in the day he brought me a large part of the essay to copy, and I remember how moved I was at its beauty, how grateful that I had been present at its inception and birth.

One afternoon he called us from our separate work, the artist from her canvas and me from my typewriter, to look at a wonderful rainbow spanning the wide valley below us. The next day he brought me a short manuscript saying, "If that seems worth while to you, you may copy it — I don't know whether there is anything in it or not." It was "The Rainbow," which appeared some months later in a popular magazine — a little gem, and a good illustration of his ability to throw the witchery of the ideal around the facts of nature. The lad with us had been learning Wordsworth's "Rainbow," a favorite of Mr. Burroughs, and it was no unusual thing of a morning to hear the rustic philosopher while frying the bacon for breakfast, singing contentedly in a sort of tune of his own making: —

"And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety."

One afternoon a neighbor came and took him in her automobile a ride of fifty miles or more, the objective point of which was Ashland, the place where he had attended a seminary in 1854 and



## BACK TO PEPACTON

1855. On his return he said it seemed like wizard's work that he could be whisked there and back in one afternoon, to that place which had been the goal of his youthful dreams! They had also called on a schoolmate whom he had not seen for forty years. He told us how a possession of that boy's had been a thing he had coveted for many months — a slate pencil with a shining copper gun-cap! "How I longed for that pencil! I tried to trade for buttons (all I had to offer in exchange), but it was too precious for my small barter, and I coveted it in vain." The wistful Celt began early to sigh for the unattainable.

We picked wild strawberries in June from the "clover lot" where the boy John Burroughs and his mother used to pick them. "I can see her now," he said reminiscently, "her bent figure moving slowly in the summer fields toward home with her basket filled. She would also go berrying on Old Clump, in early haying, long after the berries were gone in the lowlands."

During this summer of which I speak, the fields were a gorgeous mass of color — buttercups and daisies, and the orange hawkweed — a display that rivaled the carpet of gold and purple we had seen in the San Joaquin Valley, in company with John Muir three summers before. Mr. Muir was then in New York hurrying to get certain writing

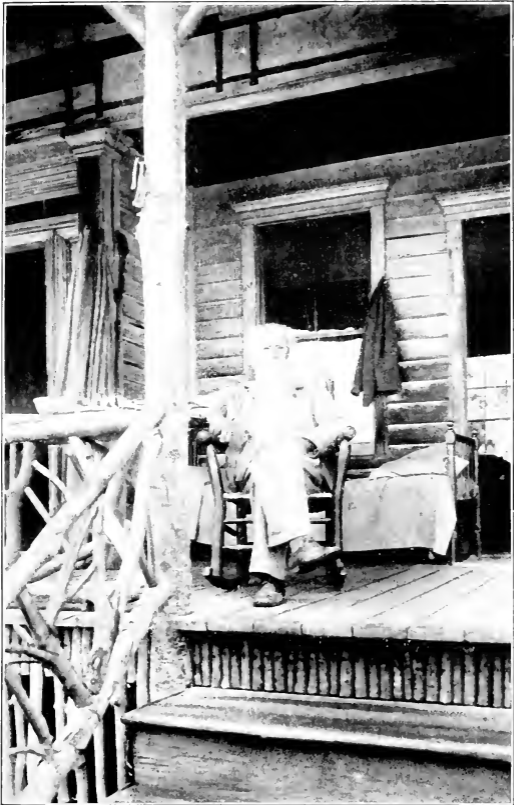
## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

done before starting for South America. He had promised to come to the Catskills, but had to keep putting it off to get copy ready, and the Laird of Woodchuck Lodge was exasperated that the mountaineer would stay in that hot Babylon, — he, the lover of the wild, — when we in the Delectable Mountains were calling him hither. As we looked upon the riot of color one day, Mr. Burroughs said, “John Muir, confound him! I wish he was here to see this at its height!”

Returning to the little gray farmhouse in the gathering dusk one late September day, Mr. Burroughs paused and turned, looking back at the old home, and up at the cattle silhouetted against the horizon. He gazed upon the landscape long and long. How fondly his eye dwells upon these scenes! So I have seen him look when about to part from a friend — as if he were trying to fix the features and expression in his mind forever.

“The older one grows, the more the later years erode away, as do the secondary rocks, and one gets down to bed-rock, — youth, — and there he wants to rest. These scenes make youth and all the early life real to me, the rest is more like a dream. How incredible it is! — all that is gone; but here it lives again.”

And yet, though he is face to face with the past at his old home, his days there are not so sad as



ON THE PORCH AT WOODCHUCK LODGE

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## BACK TO PEPACTON

some of his reminiscent talk would seem to indicate. In truth, he is serenely content, so much so that he sometimes almost chides himself for living so much in the present. "Oh, the power of a living reality to veil or blot out the Past!" he sighed. "And yet, is it not best so? Does not the grass grow above graves? Why should these lovely scenes always be a cemetery to me? There seems to have been a spell put upon them that has laid the ghosts, and I am glad." And to see him bird-nesting with his grandchildren, hunting in the woods for crooked sticks for his rustic furniture, waking the echo in the "new barn" (a barn that was new in 1844), routing out a woodchuck from a stone wall, blackberrying on the steep hillsides, or going a half-mile across the fields just to smell the fragrance of the buckwheat bloom, is to know that, wistful Celt that he is, and dominated by the spell of the Past, he is yet very much alive to the Present, out of which he is probably getting as full a measure of content as any man living to-day.

He looked about him at the close of his first stay at Woodchuck Lodge after the completion of the repairs which had made the house so homelike and comfortable, and said contentedly: "A beautiful dream come true! And to think I've stayed down there on the Hudson all these years with never the home feeling, when here were my native hills

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

waiting to cradle me as they did in my youth, and I so slow to return to them! I've been homesick for over forty years: I was an alien there; I could n't take root there. It was a lucky day when I decided to spend the rest of my summers here."

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

**I**N February, 1909, I was one of a small party which set out with Mr. Burroughs for the Pacific Coast and the Hawaiian Islands. The lure held out to him by the friend who arranged his trip was that John Muir would start from his home at Martinez, California, and await him at the Petrified Forests in Arizona; conduct him through that weirdly picturesque region, and in and around the Grand Cañon of the Colorado; camp and tramp with him in the Mojave Desert; tarry awhile in Southern California; then visit Yosemite before embarking on the Pacific preparatory to lotus-eating in Hawaii. The lure held out to the more obscure members of the party was all that has been enumerated, plus that of having these two great, simple men for traveling companions. To see the wonders of the Southwest is in itself great good fortune, but to see them in company with these two students of nature, and to study the students while the students were studying the wonders, was an incalculable privilege.

It frightens me now when I think on what a slight chance hung our opportunity for this unique journey; for Mr. Burroughs, though at first decid-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS'

ing to go, had later given it up, declaring himself to be too much of a tenderfoot to go so far from home alone at his age.

“Why should I go gadding about to see the strange and the extraordinary?” he wrote me, when trying to argue himself into abandoning the trip. “The whole gospel of my books (if they have any gospel) is ‘Stay at home; see the wonderful and the beautiful in the simple things all about you; make the most of the common and the near at hand.’ When I have gone abroad, I have carried this spirit with me, and have tested what I have seen by the nature revealed to me at my own doorstep. Well, I am glad I have triumphed at last; I feel much better and like writing again, now that this incubus is off my shoulders.” But the incubus soon rested on him again, for the next mail carried a letter begging him to reconsider and let two of his women friends accompany him. So it all came about in a few days, and we were off!

We wondered how Mr. Muir would relish two women being in the party, but assured Mr. Burroughs we should not hamper them, and should be ready to do whatever they were.

“Have no fears on that score,” he said; “Muir will be friendly if you are good listeners; and he is well worth listening to. He is very entertaining,



## ' CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

but he sometimes talks when I want to be let alone; at least he did up in Alaska."

"But you won't be crusty to him, will you?"

"Oh, no, I shan't dare to be — he is too likely to get the best of one; he is a born tease."

The long journey across the Western States (by the Santa Fé route) was full of interest at every point. Even the monotony of the Middle West was not wearisome, while the scenery and scenes in New Mexico and Arizona were fascinating in the extreme.

Mr. Burroughs had been to the Far West by a northern route, but this was all fresh territory to him, and he brought to it his usual keen appetite for new phases of nature, made still keener by a recently awakened interest in geological subjects. It enhanced the pleasure and profit of the trip a hundredfold to get his first impressions of the moving panorama, as I did when he dictated notes to me from his diary, or descriptive letters to his wife and son. The impression one gets out there of earth sculpture in process is one of the chief attractions of the region, and Mr. Burroughs never tired of studying the physiognomy of the land, and the overwhelming evidences of time and change, and of contrasting these with our still older, maturer landscapes in the East.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

In passing through Kansas he commented on the monotonous level expanse of country as being unbearable from any point of view except as good farm land. Used to hills and mountains, inviting brooks and winding roads, he turned away from this unpicturesque land, saying if it was a good place to make money, it was also a place to lose one's own soul—he was already homesick for the beauty and diversity of our more winsome country.

Two days' journey from Chicago and we reached the desert town of Adamana. As the train stopped near the little inn, a voice called out in the darkness, "Hello, Johnnie, is that you?"

"Yes, John Muir"; and there under the big dipper, on the great Arizona desert, the two friends met after a lapse of ten years.

"Muir, are n't you surprised to find me with two women in my wake?" asked Mr. Burroughs, introducing us.

"Yes; surprised that there are only two, Johnnie." Then to us, "Up in Alaska there were a dozen or two following him around, tucking him up in steamer rugs, putting pillows to his head, running to him with a flower, or a description of a bird—Oh, two is a very moderate number, Johnnie, but we'll manage to worry through with them, somehow." And picking up part of our luggage, the tall, grizzly Scot led the way to the inn.

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

The next day we drove nine miles over the rolling desert to visit one of the petrified forests, of which there are five in that vicinity. Blended with the unwonted scenes — the gray sands dotted with sagebrush and greasewood, the leaping jack rabbits, the frightened bands of half-wild horses, the distant buttes and mesas, and the brilliant blue of the Arizona sky — is the memory of that talk of Mr. Muir's during the long drive, a talk which for range and raciness I have never heard equaled. He often uses the broad dialect of the Scot, translating as he goes along. His forte is in monologue. He is a most engaging talker, — discursive, grave and gay, — mingling thrilling adventures, side-splitting anecdotes, choice quotations, apt characterizations, scientific data, enthusiastic descriptions, sarcastic comments, scornful denunciations, inimitable mimicry.

Mr. Burroughs, on the contrary, is not a ready talker; he gives of his best in his books. He establishes intimate relations with his reader, Mr. Muir with his listener. He is more fond of an interchange of ideas than is Mr. Muir; is not the least inclined to banter or to get the better of one; is so averse to witnessing discomfiture that even when forced into an argument, he is loath to push it to the bitter end. Yet when he does engage in argument, he drives things home with

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

very telling force, especially when writing on debatable points.

As we drove along the desert, Mr. Muir pointed to a lofty plateau toward which we were tending, — “Robbers’ Roost,” — where sheep-stealers hie themselves, commanding the view for hundreds of miles in every direction. I wish I could make vivid the panorama we saw from this vantage-ground — the desert in the foreground, and far away against the sky the curiously carved pink and purple and lilac mountains, while immediately below us lay the dry river-bed over which a gaunt raven flew and croaked ominously, and a little beyond rose the various buttes, mauve and terracotta colored, from whose sides and at whose bases projected the petrified trees. There lay the giant trees, straight and tapering — no branching as in our trees of to-day. The trunks are often flattened, as though they had been under great pressure, often the very bark seemed to be on them (though it was petrified bark), and on some we saw marks of insect tracery like those made by the borers of to-day. Some of the trunks were more than one hundred and fifty feet long, and five to seven feet in diameter, prostrate but intact, looking as though uprooted where they lay. Others were broken at regular intervals, as though sawed into stove lengths. In places the ground looks like

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

a chip-yard, the chips dry and white as though bleached by the sun. The eye is deceived; chips these surely are, you think, but the ear corrects this impression, for as your feet strike the fragments, the clinking sound proves that they are stone. In some of the other forests, visited later, the chips and larger fragments, and the interior of the trunks, are gorgeously colored, so that we walked on a natural mosaic of jasper, chalcedony, onyx, and agate. In many fragments the cell-structure of the wood is still visible, but in others nature has carried the process further, and crystallization has transformed the wood of these old, old trees into the brilliant fragments we can have for the carrying—“beautiful wood replaced by beautiful stone,” as Mr. Muir was fond of saying.

With what wonder and incredulity we roamed about witnessing the strange spectacle!—the prostrate monarchs with hearts of jasper and chalcedony, now silent and rigid in this desolate region where they basked in the sunlight and swayed in the winds millions of years ago. Only a small part of the old forest is as yet exposed; these trees, buried for ages beneath the early seas, becoming petrified as they lay, are, after ages more, gradually being unearthed as the softer parts of the soil covering them wears away.

The scenic aspects of the place, the powerful

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

appeal it made to the imagination, the evidences of infinite time, the wonderful metamorphosis from vegetable life to these petrified remains which copy so faithfully the form and structure of the living trees, were powerfully enhanced by the sight of these two men wandering amid these ruins of Carboniferous time, sometimes in earnest conversation, oftener in silence; again in serious question from the one and perhaps bantering answer from the other; for although Mr. Burroughs was intensely interested in this spectacle, and full of cogitations and questions as to the cause and explanation of it all, Mr. Muir was not disposed to treat questions seriously.

“Oh, get a primer of geology, Johnnie,” he would say when the earnest Eastern student would ask for a solution of some of the puzzles arising in his mind — a perversity that was especially annoying, since the Scot had carefully explored these regions, and was doubtless well equipped to adduce reasonable explanations had he been so minded. That very forest to which we went on that first day, and where we ate our luncheon from the trunk of a great petrified *Sigillaria*, had been discovered by Mr. Muir and his daughter a few years before as they were riding over the sandy plateau. He told us how excited he was that night — he could not sleep, but lay awake trying to restore the living

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

forest in imagination, for, from the petrified remains, he could tell to what order these giants belonged.

When others congregate to eat, the Scot seems specially impelled to talk. With a fine disregard for food, he sat and crumbled dry bread, occasionally putting a bit in his mouth, talking while the eating was going on. He is likewise independent of sleep. "Sleep!" he would exclaim, when the rest of us, after a long day of sight-seeing, would have to yield to our sense of fatigue, "why, you can sleep when you get back home, or, at least, in the grave."

Mr. Burroughs, on the contrary, is specially dependent upon sleep and food in order to do his work or to enjoy anything. On our arrival at the Grand Cañon in the morning, after a night of travel and fasting, all the rest of us felt the need of refreshing ourselves and taking breakfast before we would even take a peep at the great rose-purple abyss out there a few steps from the hotel, but the teasing Scot jeered at us for thinking of eating when there was that sublime spectacle to be seen. When we did go out to the rim, Mr. Muir preceded us, and, as we approached, waved toward the great abyss and said: "There! Empty your heads of all vanity, and look!" And we did look, overwhelmed by what must be the most truly sublime spectacle

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

this earth has to offer — a veritable terrestrial Book of Revelation, as Mr. Burroughs said.

We followed a little path along the rim, led by Mr. Muir, to where we could escape from the other sight-seers, and there we sat on the rocks, though the snow lay in patches on the ground that bright February day. Mr. Burroughs made a fire of juniper brush, and as the fragrant incense rose on the air, with that wondrous spectacle before our eyes, we listened to Mr. Muir reciting some lines from Milton — almost the only poet one would think of quoting in the presence of such solemn, awful beauty.

Mr. Muir tried to dissuade us the next day from going down into the cañon: "Don't straddle a mule and poke your noses down to the ground, and plunge down that dangerous icy trail, imagining, because you get a few shivers down your backs, you are seeing the glories of the cañon, or getting any conception of the noble river that made it. You must climb, climb, to see the glories, always." But when Mr. Burroughs would ask him where we could climb to, to see the cañon, since under his guidance we had been brought to the very edge on the top, he did not deign to explain, but continued to deride the project of the descent into the depths — a way the dear man has of meeting an argument that is a bit annoying at times.



## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

We did go down into the cañon on mule-back, — down, down, over four thousand feet, — and the jeering Scot went with us, sitting his mule uncompromisingly, and indulging in many a jest at the expense of the terrified women who felt, when too late to retreat, that it would have been better to heed his advice. Still, after the descent, and then the ascent, were safely accomplished, we were glad we had not let him dissuade us. None of us can ever forget that day, with its rich and varied experiences, the mingled fear and awe and exultation, the overpowering emotions felt at each new revelation of the stupendous spectacle, often relieved by the lively sallies of Mr. Muir. We ate our luncheon on the old Cambrian plateau, the mighty Colorado, still a thousand feet below us, looking entirely inadequate to have accomplished the tremendous results we were witnessing.

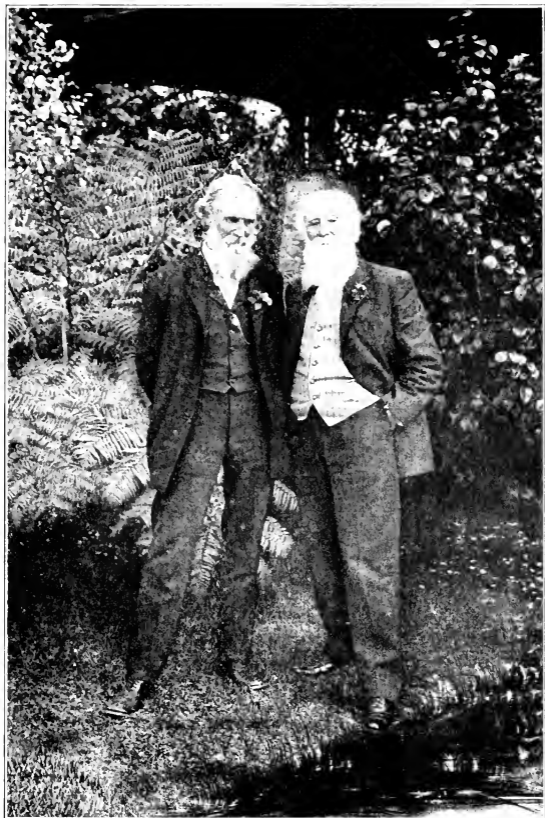
One day at the cañon, feeling acutely aware of our incalculable privilege, I said, “To think of having the Grand Cañon, and John Burroughs and John Muir thrown in!”

“I wish Muir *was* thrown in, sometimes,” retorted Mr. Burroughs, with a twinkle in his eye, “when he gets between me and the cañon.”

In contrast to Mr. Muir, the Wanderer, is Mr. Burroughs, the Home-lover, one who is under the

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

spell of the near and the familiar. The scenes of his boyhood in the Catskills, the woods he wandered in about Washington during the years he dwelt there, his later tramping-ground along the Hudson — these are the scenes he has made his readers love because he has loved them so much himself; and however we may enjoy his journeyings in “Mellow England,” in “Green Alaska,” in Jamaica, or his philosophical or speculative essays, we find his stay-at-home things the best. And he likes the familiar scenes and things the best, much as he enjoyed the wonders that the great West offered. The robins in Yosemite Valley and the skylarks in the Hawaiian Islands, because these were a part of his earlier associations, did more to endear these places to him than did the wonders themselves. On Hawaii, where we saw the world’s greatest active volcano throwing up its fountains of molten lava sixty or more feet high, the masses falling with a roar like that of the “husky-voiced sea,” Mr. Burroughs found it difficult to understand why some of us were so fascinated that we wanted to stay all night, willing to endure the discomforts of a resting-place on lava rocks, occasional stifling gusts of sulphur fumes, dripping rain, and heat that scorched our veiled faces, so long as we could gaze on that boiling, tumbling, heaving, ever-changing lake of fire. Such wild, terrible,



JOHN MUIR AND JOHN BURROUGHS, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

THE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

CARTON, LENOX, TILDEN  
FOUNDATIONS

unfamiliar beauty could not long hold him under its spell.

A veritable homesickness came over him amid unfamiliar scenes. One day in early March, after journeying all day over the strange region of the California desert, with its giant cacti, its lava-beds, its volcanic cones, its rugged, barren mountains, its deep gorges and cañons, its snow-capped peaks, on reaching San Bernardino, so green and fresh and smiling in the late afternoon sun, and riding through miles and miles of orange groves to Riverside, this return to a winsome nature (though unlike his own), after so much of the forbidding aspect had been before us, was to Mr. Burroughs like water brooks to the thirsty hart.

His abiding love for early friends, too, crops out on all occasions. Twice while away on this trip he received the proffer of honorary degrees from two of our American universities. Loath to accept such honors at any time, he was especially so now, and declined, defending himself by saying that the acceptance would have necessitated his hurrying straight home across the States to have the degrees conferred upon him, when he was planning to tarry in Iowa and see an old schoolmate.

“I did n’t want to do it,” he said petulantly; “I wanted to stop and see Sandy Smith” — his tone being not unlike what he would have used when as

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

a boy he doubtless coaxed to "go out and play with Sandy."

Mr. Burroughs is too much a follower of the genuinely simple life to be long contented in hotels, however genial the hospitality. He declared the elegant suite at the Mission Inn at Riverside, which was tendered to him and his party in the most cordial, unobtrusive way, was too luxurious for a "Slabsider" like him. It was positively painful to him to be asked, as he was frequently on the Western and Hawaiian tour, to address audiences, or "just to come and meet the students" at various schools and colleges. Such meetings usually meant being "roped in" to making a speech, often in spite of assurances to the contrary. I have known him to slip away from a men's club early in the evening, before dinner was announced, and return to our little cottage in Pasadena, where he would munch contentedly an uncooked wafer, drink a cup of hot water, read a little geology, and go to bed at the seasonable hour of nine, the next morning awakening with a keen appetite for the new day, for his breakfast, and for his forenoon of work, whereas, had he stayed out till eleven or twelve, eaten a hearty dinner, and been stimulated and excited by much talk, he would have awakened without the joy in the morning which he has managed to carry through his seventy-

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

six years, and which his readers, who rejoice in the freshness and tranquillity of his pages, hope he will keep till he reaches the end of the Long Road.

Mr. Muir is as averse to speaking in public as is Mr. Burroughs, much as he likes to talk. They both dislike the noise and confusion of cities, and what we ordinarily mean by social life. Mr. Burroughs is less an alien in cities than is Mr. Muir, yet, on the whole, he is more of a solitaire, more of a recluse. He avoids men where the other seeks them. He cannot deal or dicker with men, but the canny Scot can do this, if need be, and even enjoy it. Circumstances seem to have made Mr. Muir spend most of his years apart from his fellows, although by nature he is decidedly gregarious; circumstances seem to have decreed that Mr. Burroughs spend the greater part of his life among his fellow-men, though there is much of the hermit in his make-up.

Mr. Muir gets lost in cities — this man who can find his way on the trackless desert, the untrodden glaciers, and in the most remote and inaccessible mountain heights. He will never admit that his wanderings were lonely: "You can always have the best part of your friends with you," he said; "it is only when people cease to love that they are separated."

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

One Sunday in Pasadena we had planned to have a picnic up one of the cañons, but the rain decreed otherwise. So, discarding tables and other appurtenances of life within doors, we picnicked on the floor of our sitting-room, making merry there with the luncheon we had prepared for the jaunt. While passing back and forth through the room in our preparations, we heard the men of the party talk in fragments, and amusing fragments they were. Once when Mr. Browne, the editor of the "Dial," was discussing some point in connection with the Spanish-American War, I heard Mr. Muir say, with a sigh of relief, "I was getting flowers up on the Tuolumne meadows then, and did n't have to bother about those questions." When another friend was criticizing Mr. Roosevelt for the reputed slaughter of so many animals in Africa, and Mr. Burroughs declared he did not credit half the things the papers said the hunter was doing, Mr. Muir said, half chidingly, half tolerantly, "Roosevelt, the muggins, I am afraid he is having a good time putting bullets through those friends of his." Now I had heard him call Mr. Burroughs "You muggins" in the same winning, endearing way he said "Johnnie"; I had heard him speak of a petrified tree in the Sigillaria forest as a "muggins"; of a bear that trespassed on his flowery domains in the Sierra meadows as a



## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

“muggins” that he tried to look out of countenance and failed; of a “comical little muggins of a daisy” that some one had named after him; and one day he had rejoiced my heart by dubbing me “You muggins, you”; and behold! here he was now applying the elastic term to our many-sided (I did not say “strenuous”) ex-President! Later I heard him apply it to a Yosemite waterfall, and by then should not have been surprised to hear him speak of a mighty glacier, or a giant sequoia, as a “muggins.”

“Stickeen,” Mr. Muir’s incomparable dog story, came out in book form while we were in Pasadena. I sent a copy to my brother, who wrote later asking me to inquire of Mr. Muir why he did not keep Stickeen after their perilous adventures together. So I put the question to him one day. “Keep him!” he ejaculated, as he straightened his back, and the derisive wrinkles appeared on one side of his nose; “keep him! he was n’t mine — I ’m Scotch, I never steal.” Then he explained that Stickeen’s real master was attached to him; that he could not take him from him; and besides, the dog was accustomed to a cold climate, and would have been very unhappy in California. “Oh, no, I could n’t keep Stickeen,” he said wistfully, but one felt that he *had* kept Stickeen, the best part of him, by immortalizing him in that story.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS ;

While we were housekeeping in Pasadena, Mr. Burroughs began writing on the Grand Cañon. One morning, after having disposed of several untimely callers, he had finally settled down to work. We sat around the big table writing or reading. Mr. Burroughs was there in the body, but in spirit we could see he was at the "Divine Abyss," as he called the Cañon. Once he read us a few sentences which were so good that I resolved we must try harder to prevent interruptions, that he might keep all his writing up to that standard. But while engaged in letter-writing, some point arose, and, forgetting my laudable resolution, I put a question to him. Answering me abstractedly, he went on with his writing. Then I realized how inexcusable it was to intrude my trivialities at such a time. Castigating myself and resolving anew, I wrote on in contrite silence. After a little Mr. Burroughs paused and lifted his head; his expression was puzzled, as though wrestling with some profound thought, or weighing some nicety of expression; I saw he was about to speak — perhaps to utter his latest impression concerning the glories of the Cañon. As he opened his lips this is what we heard: "*Could n't we warm up those Saratoga chips for luncheon?*" Whereupon it will be seen that the abyss he was then cogitating about was in the epigastric region, instead of in Arizona.

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

Mr. Muir likes a laugh at his own expense. He told us of a school-teacher in the vicinity of his home instructing her pupils about Alaska and the glaciers; and on telling them that the great Muir Glacier was named after their neighbor, who discovered it, one little boy piped up with, "What, not that old man that drives around in a buggy!"

I may as well offset this with one of our Hawaiian experiences. When we were in Honolulu, we heard that one of the teachers there, thinking to make a special impression upon her pupils, told them the main facts about Mr. Burroughs's writings, their scope and influence, what he stood for as a nature writer, his place in literature, and then described his appearance, and said, "And this noted man, this great nature lover, is right here — a guest in our city!" A little lad broke in with, "I know — I saw him yesterday — he was in our yard stealing mangoes."

One day, while still in Pasadena, I told Mr. Muir that on April 3d a few of us wished to celebrate Mr. Burroughs's birthday, his seventy-second, by a picnic up one of the Mount Lowe cañons. He said it would be impossible for him to be with us on that day, as he had to go up to San Francisco. On my expressing keen disappointment he teasingly said: —

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

“Why, you will have Johnnie, and Mr. Browne, and the mountains — what more do you want?”

“But we want *you*,” I protested, assuring him that this was not a case where one could say, —

“How happy could I be with either,  
Were t’ other dear Johnnie away!”

“Well, then, why can’t you have it some other day?”

“Because he was n’t born some other day.”

“But why must you be tied to the calendar? Can’t you celebrate Johnnie’s birthday a few days later just as well? Such a stickler for the exact date as you are, I never saw.”

Thus he bantered, but when he had to leave us, we knew he was as disappointed as we all were that he could not be with us on that “exact date.”

How he did enjoy hectoring us for our absurd mistake in not reading our long tickets through, consequently getting on the Santa Fé train to go up to San Francisco when a little coupon stated that the ticket took us by the Coast line. We were bound to let the Scot know of our mistake, and our necessary transfer to the other road (as we had arranged to meet him at a certain point on the Santa Fé), else, I suppose, we never should have given him that chance to jeer at us. He made us

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

tell him all about it when we met, and shaking with laughter at all the complications the mistake entailed, he declared, "Oh, but that's a bully story!"

"It'll put an inch of fat on Muir's ribs," retorted "Oom John," who was not without chagrin at the fiasco.

"Johnnie, when you sail for Honolulu, I expect, unless you're narrowly watched, you'll get on the wrong ship and go off to Vancouver," teased the fun-loving Scot.

In Yosemite, Mr. Muir told us about the great trees he used to saw into timber during his early years in the valley, showing us the site of his old mill, and bragging that he built it and kept it in repair at a cost of less than twenty-five cents a year. It seemed strange that he, a tree-lover, could have cut down those noble spruces and firs, and I whispered this to Mr. Burroughs.

"Ask him about it," said the latter, "ask him." So I did.

"Bless you, I never cut down the trees — I only sawed those the Lord had felled."

The storms that swept down the mountains had laid these monarchs low, and the thrifty Scot had merely taken advantage of the ill winds, at the same time helping nature to get rid of the débris.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

“How does this compare with Esopus Valley, Johnnie?” Mr. Muir was fond of asking Mr. Burroughs, when he saw the latter gazing in admiration at mighty El Capitan, or the thundering Yosemite Falls. Or he would say, “How is that for a piece of glacial work, Johnnie?” as he pointed to Half Dome and told how the glacier had worn off at least half a mile from its top, and then had sawed right down through the valley.

“O Lord! that’s too much, Muir,” answered Mr. Burroughs. He declared that it stuck in his crop — this theory that ice alone accounts for this great valley cut out of the solid rocks. When the Scot would get to riding his ice-hobby too hard, Mr. Burroughs would query, “But, Muir, the million years before the ice age — what was going on here then?”

“Oh, God knows,” said Mr. Muir, but vouchsafed no further explanation.

“With my itch for geology,” said Mr. Burroughs, “I want it scratched all the time, and Muir does n’t want to scratch it.” So he dropped his questions, which elicited only bantering answers from the mountaineer, and gave himself up to sheer admiration of the glories and beauties of the region, declaring that of all the elemental scenes he had beheld, Yosemite beat them all — “The perpetual thunder peal of the waters dashing like mad over



JOHN BURROUGHS AND JOHN MUIR IN THE YOSEMITE

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS



gigantic cliffs, the elemental granite rocks — it is a veritable ‘wreck of matter and crush of worlds’ that we see here.”

Mr. Burroughs urged Mr. Muir again and again to reclaim his early studies in the Sierra which were printed in the “Overland Monthly” years ago, and give them to the public now with the digested information which he alone can supply, and which is as yet inaccessible in his voluminous notes and sketches of the region. At Mr. Muir’s home we saw literally barrels of these notes. He admitted that he had always been dilatory about writing, but not about studying or note-taking; often making notes at night when fatigued from climbing and from two and three days’ fasting; but the putting of them into literature is irksome to him. Yet, much as he dislikes the labor of writing, he will shut himself away from the air and sunshine for weeks at a time, if need arises, and write vigorously in behalf of the preservation of our forests. He did this back in the late seventies, and in more recent years has been tireless in his efforts to secure protection to our noble forests when danger has threatened them.

Mr. Muir’s knowledge of the physiognomy and botany of most of the countries of the globe is extensive, and he has recently added South

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

America and South Africa to his list; there is probably no man living, and but few who have lived, so thoroughly conversant with the effects of glaciation as is he; yet, unless he puts his observations into writing, much of his intimate knowledge of these things must be lost when he passes on. And, as Mr. Burroughs says, "The world wants this knowledge seasoned with John Muir, not his mere facts. He could accumulate enough notes to fill Yosemite, yet that would be worth little. He has spent years studying and sketching the rocks, and noting facts about them, but you can't reconstruct beauty and sublimity out of mere notes and sketches. He must work his harvest into bread." But concerning this writing Mr. Muir confesses he feels the hopelessness of giving his readers anything but crumbs from the great table God has spread: "I can write only hints to incite good wanderers to come to the feast."

Here we see the marked contrast between these two nature students: Mr. Muir talks because he can't help it, and his talk is good literature; he writes only because he has to, on occasion; while Mr. Burroughs writes because he can't help it, and talks when he can't get out of it. Mr. Muir, the Wanderer, needs a continent to roam in; while Mr. Burroughs, the Saunterer, needs only a neighborhood or a farm. The Wanderer is content to

## CAMPING WITH BURROUGHS AND MUIR

scale mountains; the Saunterer really climbs the mountain after he gets home, as he makes it truly his own only by dreaming over it and writing about it. The Wanderer finds writing irksome; the Saunterer is never so well or so happy as when he can write; his food nourishes him better, the atmosphere is sweeter, the days are brighter. The Wanderer has gathered his harvest from wide fields, just for the gathering; he has not threshed it out and put it into the bread of literature — only a few loaves; the Saunterer has gathered his harvest from a rather circumscribed field, but has threshed it out to the last sheaf; has made many loaves; and it is because he himself so enjoys writing that his readers find such joy and morning freshness in his books, his own joy being communicated to his reader, as Mr. Muir's own enthusiasm is communicated to his hearer. With Mr. Burroughs, if his field of observation is closely gleaned, he turns aside into subjective fields and philosophizes — a thing which Mr. Muir never does.

One of the striking things about Mr. Muir is his generosity; and though so poor in his youth and early adult life, he has now the wherewithal to be generous. His years of frugality have, strange to say, made him feel a certain contempt for money.

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

At El Tovar he asked, "What boy brought up my bags?" Whereupon a string of bell-boys promptly appeared for their fees, and Mr. Muir handed out tips to all the waiting lads, saying in a droll way, "I did n't know I had so many bags." When we tried to reimburse him for the Yosemite trip, he would have none of it, saying, almost peevishly, "Now don't annoy me about that." Yet, if he thinks one is trying to get the best of him, he can look after the shekels as well as any one. One day in Yosemite when we were to go for an all day's tramp and wished a luncheon prepared at the hotel, on learning of the price they were to charge, he turned his back on the landlord and dispatched one of us to the little store, where, for little more than the hotel would have charged for one person, a luncheon for five was procured, and then he really chuckled that he had been able to snap his fingers at mine host, who had thought he had us at his mercy.

I see I have kept Mr. Muir close to the footlights most of the time, allowing Mr. Burroughs to hover in the background where he blends with the neutral tones; but so it was in all the thrilling scenes in the Western drama — Mr. Muir and the desert, Mr. Muir and the petrified trees, Mr. Muir and the cañon, Mr. Muir and Yosemite; while

with "Oom John," it was a blending with the scene, a quiet, brooding absorption that made him seem a part of them — the desert, the petrified trees, the Grand Cañon, Yosemite, and Mr. Burroughs inseparably linked with them, but seldom standing out in sharp contrast to them, as the "Beloved Egotist" stood out on all occasions.

Perhaps the most idyllic of all our days of camping and tramping with John of Birds and John of Mountains was the day in Yosemite when we tramped to Nevada and Vernal Falls, a distance of fourteen miles, returning to Camp Ahwahnee at night, weary almost to exhaustion, but strangely uplifted by the beauty and sublimity in which we had lived and moved and had our being. Our brown tents stood hospitably open, and out in the great open space in front we sat around the campfire under the noble spruces and firs, the Merced flowing softly on our right, mighty Yosemite Falls thundering away in the distance, while the moon rose over Sentinel Rock, lending a touch of ineffable beauty to the scene, and a voice, that is now forever silenced, lent to the rhymes of the poets its richness of varied emotion, as it chanted choicest selections from the Golden Poems of all time. We lingered long after the other campers had gone to rest, loath to bring to its close a day so replete

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

with sublimity and beauty. Mr. Burroughs summed it up as he said good-night: "A day with the gods of eld — a holy day in the temple of the gods."

## JOHN BURROUGHS: AN APPRECIATION

**J**OHIN is making an impression on his age — has come to stay — has veritable, indisputable, dynamic gifts,” Walt Whitman said familiarly to a friend in 1888, in commenting on our subject’s place in literature. And of a letter written to him by Mr. Burroughs that same year he said: “It is a June letter, worthy of June; written in John’s best outdoor mood. Why, it gets into your blood, and makes you feel worth while. I sit here, helpless as I am, and breathe it in like fresh air.”

Minot Savage once asked in a sermon if it did not occur to his hearers that John Burroughs gets a little more of June than the rest of us do, and added that Mr. Burroughs had paid years of consecration of thought and patient study of the lives of birds and flowers, and so had bought the right to take June and all that it means into his brain and heart and life; and that if the rest of us wish these joys, we must purchase them on the same terms. We are often led to ask what month he has not taken into his heart and life, and given out again in his writings. Perhaps most of all he has taken April into his heart, as his essay on it in “Birds and Poets” will show: —

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

How it [April] touches one and makes him both glad and sad! The voices of the arriving birds, the migrating fowls, the clouds of pigeons sweeping across the sky or filling the woods, the elfin horn of the first honey-bee venturing abroad in the middle of the day, the clear piping of the little frogs in the marshes at sundown, the camp-fire in the sugar-bush, the smoke seen afar rising over the trees, the tinge of green that comes so suddenly on the sunny knolls and slopes, the full translucent streams, the waxing and warming sun, — how these things and others like them are noted by the eager eye and ear! April is my natal month, and I am born again into new delight and new surprises at each return of it. Its name has an indescribable charm to me. Its two syllables are like the calls of the first birds, — like that of the phœbe-bird, or of the meadowlark.

But why continue? The whole essay breathes of swelling buds, springing grass, calls of birds, April flowers, April odors, and April's uncloying freshness and charm. As we realize what the returning spring brings to this writer, we say with Bliss Carman: —

“ Make [him] over, Mother April,  
When the sap begins to stir.”

I fancy there are many of his readers who will echo what one of his friends has said to him: “ For me the 3d of April will ever stand apart in the calendar with a poignant beauty and sweetness because it is your birthday. It is the keynote to which



## AN APPRECIATION

the whole springtime music is set." Or another: "If April 3d comes in like any other day, please understand that it will be because she does not dare to show how glad she is over her own doings." On another birthday, the same correspondent says: "I find that you are so inwoven with the springtime that I shall never again be able to resolve the season into its elements. But I am the richer for it. I feel a sort of compassion for one who has never seen the spring through your eyes."

Mr. Burroughs puts his reader into close and sympathetic communion with the open-air world as no other literary naturalist has done. Gilbert White reported with painstaking fidelity the natural history of Selborne; Thoreau gave Thoreau with glimpses of nature thrown in; Richard Jefferies, in dreamy, introspective descriptions of rare beauty and delicacy, portrayed his own mystical impressions of nature; but Mr. Burroughs takes us with him to the homes and haunts of the wild creatures, sets us down in their midst, and lets us see and hear and feel just what is going on. We read his books and echo Whitman's verdict on them: "They take me outdoors! God bless outdoors!" And since God *has* blessed outdoors, we say, "God bless John Burroughs for taking us out of doors with him!"

Our writer never prates about nature, telling us

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

to look and admire. He loves the common, everyday life about him, sees it more intimately than you or I see it, and tells about it so simply and clearly that he begets a like feeling in his reader. It was enjoined of the early Puritans "to walke honestlie in the sweete fields and woodes." How well our friend has obeyed this injunction!

And what an unobtrusive lover he is! Although it is through him that his mistress stands revealed, it is not until we look closely that we spy her adorer in the background, intent only on unveiling her charms. How does he do this? First by succumbing himself — Nature's graces, her inconsistencies, even her objectionable traits appeal to him. Like the true lover, he is captivated by each of her phases, and surrenders himself without reserve. Such homage makes him the recipient of her choicest treasures, her most adorable revelations.

I have mentioned Gilbert White's contributions to the literature about nature: one must admire the man's untiring enthusiasm, but his book is mainly a storehouse of facts; how rarely does he invest the facts with charm! To pry into nature's secrets and conscientiously report them seems to be the aim of the English parson; but we get so little of the parson himself. What were his feelings about all these things he has been at such pains



MR. BURROUGHS SITTING FOR A STATUETTE



## AN APPRECIATION

to record? The things themselves are not enough. It is not alluring to be told soberly: —

Hedge-hogs abound in my garden and fields. The manner in which they eat the roots of the plaintain in the grass walk is very curious; with their upper mandible, which is much larger than the lower, they bore under the plant, and so eat the root off upward, leaving the tuft of leaves untouched.

And so on. By way of contrast, see how Mr. Burroughs treats a similar subject. After describing the porcupine, mingling description and human encounter, thereby enlisting the reader's interest, he says: —

In what a peevish, injured tone the creature did complain of our unfair tactics! He protested and protested, and whimpered and scolded like some infirm old man tormented by boys. His game after we led him forth was to keep himself as much as possible in the shape of a ball, but with two sticks and the cord we finally threw him over on his back and exposed his quill-less and vulnerable under side, when he fairly surrendered and seemed to say, "Now you may do with me as you like."

Here one gets the porcupine and Mr. Burroughs too.

Thoreau keeps his reader at arm's length, invites and repels at the same time, piques one by his spiciness, and exasperates by his opinionatedness. You want to see his bean-field, but know you would be an intruder. He might even tell you to

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

your face that he was happiest the mornings when nobody called. He likes to advise and berate, but at long range. Speaking of these two writers, Whitman once said, "Outdoors taught Burroughs gentle things about men — it had no such effect upon Thoreau."

Richard Jefferies appeals to lovers of nature and lovers of literature as well. He has the poet's eye and is a sympathetic spectator, but seldom gives one much to carry away. His descriptions, musical as they are, barely escape being wearisome at times. In his "Pageant of Summer" he babbles prettily of green fields, but it is a long, long summer and one is hardly sorry to see its close. In some of his writings he affects one unpleasantly, gives an uncanny feeling; one divines the invalid as well as the mystic back of them; there is a hectic flush, perhaps a neurotic taint. Beautiful, yes, but not the beauty of health and sanity. It is the same indescribable feeling I get in reading that pathetically beautiful book, "The Road-Mender," by "Michael Fairless" — the gleam of the White Gate is seen all along the Road, though the writer strives so bravely to keep it hidden till it must open to let him pass. One of the purest gems of Jefferies — "Hours of Spring" — has a pathos and haunting melody of compelling poignancy. It is like a white violet or a hepatica.

## AN APPRECIATION

But with Mr. Burroughs we feel how preëminently sane and healthy he is. His essays have the perennial charm of the mountain brooks that flow down the hills and through the fertile valleys of his Catskill home. They are redolent of the soil, of leaf mould, of the good brown earth. His art pierces through our habitual indifference to Nature and kindles our interest in, not her beauty alone, but in her rugged, uncouth, and democratic qualities.

Like the true walker that he describes, he himself "is not merely a spectator of the panorama of nature, but is a participator in it. He experiences the country he passes through, — tastes it, feels it, absorbs it." Let us try this writer by his own test. He says: "When one tries to report nature he has to remember that every object has a history which involves its surroundings, and that the depth of the interest which it awakens in us is in the proportion that its integrity in this respect is preserved." He must, as we know Mr. Burroughs does, bring home the river and the sky when he brings home the sparrow that he finds singing at dawn on the alder bough; must make us see and hear the bird *on the bough*, and this is worth a whole museum of stuffed and labeled specimens. To do this requires a peculiar gift, one which our essayist has to an unusual degree — an imagination

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

that goes straight to the heart of whatever he writes about, combined with a verbal magic that re-creates what he has seen. Things are felicitously seen by Mr. Burroughs, and then felicitously said. A dainty bit in Sidney's, "Apologie for Poetrie" seems to me aptly to characterize our author's prose: "The uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the minde, which is the end of speech."

One can pick out at random from his books innumerable poetic conceits: the closed gentian is the "nun among flowers"; a patch of fringed polygalas resembles a "flock of rose-purple butterflies" alighted on the ground; the male and female flowers of the early everlasting are "found separated from each other in well-defined groups, like men and women in an old-fashioned country church"; "the note of the pewee is a human sigh"; the bloodroot — "a full-blown flower with a young one folded in a leaf beneath it, only the bud emerging, like the head of a papoose protruding from its mother's blanket." Speaking of the wild orchids known as "lady's-slippers," see the inimitable way in which he puts you on the spot where they grow: "Most of the floral ladies leave their slippers in swampy places in the woods, only the stemless one (*Cypripedium acaule*) leaves hers on dry ground before she reaches the swamp, com-



## AN APPRECIATION

monly under evergreen trees where the carpet of pine needles will not hurt her feet." Almost always he invests his descriptions with some human touch that gives them rare charm — nature and human nature blended — if it is merely the coming upon a red clover in England —

"The first red clover head just bloomed . . . but like the people I meet, it has a ruddier cheek than those at home."

When we ask ourselves what it is that makes his essays so engaging, we conclude it is largely due to their lucidity, spontaneity, and large simplicity — qualities which make up a style original, fresh, convincing. His writing, whether about nature, literature, science, or philosophy, is always suggestive, potent, pithy; his humor is delicious; he says things in a crisp, often racy, way. Yet what a sense of leisureliness one has in reading him, as well as a sense of companionability!

What distinguishes him most, perhaps, is his vivid and poetic apprehension of the mere fact. He never flings dry facts at us, but facts are always his inspiration. He never seeks to go behind them, and seldom to use them as symbols, as does Thoreau. Thoreau preaches and teaches always; Mr. Burroughs, never. The facts themselves fill him with wonder and delight — a wonder and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

delight his reader shares. The seasons, the life of the birds and the animals, the face of nature, the ever new, the ever common day — all kindle his enthusiasm and refresh his soul. The witchery of the ideal is upon his page without doubt, but he will not pervert natural history one jot or tittle for the sake of making a pretty story. His whole aim is to invest the fact with living interest without in the least lessening its value as a fact. He does not deceive himself by what he wants to be true; the scientist in him is always holding the poet in check. Of all contemporary writers in this field, he is the one upon whom we can always depend to be intellectually honest. He has an abiding hankering after the true, the genuine, the real; cannot stand, and never could stand, any tampering with the truth. Had he been Cromwell's portrait painter, he would have delighted in his subject's injunction: "Paint me as I am, mole and all." And he would have made the mole interesting; he has done so, but that is a mole of another color.

This instinct for the truth being so strong in him, he knows it when he sees it in others; he detects its absence, too; and has no patience and scant mercy for those past-masters in the art of blinking facts, — those natural-history romancers who, realizing that "the crowd must have emphatic warrant," are not content with the infinite

## AN APPRECIATION

variety of nature, but must needs spend their art in the wasteful and ridiculous excess of painting the lily, perfuming the violet, and giving to the rainbow an added hue. Accordingly, when one warps the truth to suit his purpose, especially in the realm of nature, he must expect this hater of shams to raise a warning voice — “Beware the wolf in sheep’s clothing!” But he never cries “Wolf!” when there is no wolf, and he gives warm and generous praise to deserving ones.

It has surprised some of his readers, who know how kindly he is by nature, and how he shrinks from witnessing pain, in beast or man, much less inflicting it, to see his severity when nature is traduced — for he shows all the fight and fury and all the defense of the mother bird when her young are attacked. He won’t suffer even a porcupine to be misrepresented without bristling up in its defense.

I have said that he never preaches, never seeks to give a moral twist to his observations of nature, but I recall a few instances where he does do a bit of moralizing; for example, when he speaks of the calmness and dignity of the hawk when attacked by crows or kingbirds: “He seldom deigns to notice his noisy and furious antagonist, but deliberately wheels about in that aërial spiral, and mounts and

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

mounts till his pursuers grow dizzy and return to earth again. It is quite original, this mode of getting rid of an unworthy opponent — rising to heights where the braggart is dazed and bewildered and loses his reckoning! I'm not sure but it is worthy of imitation." Or, in writing of work on the farm, especially stone-fence making, he speaks of clearing the fields of the stones that are built into boundaries: "If there are ever sermons in stones, it is when they are built into a stone wall — turning your hindrances into helps, shielding your crops behind the obstacles to your husbandry, making the enemies of the plough stand guard over its products." But do we find such sermonizing irksome?

Just as "all architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it," so is all nature. Lovers of Nature muse and dream and invite their own souls. They interpret themselves, not Nature. She reflects their thoughts and minds, gives them, after all, only what they bring to her. And the writer who brings much — much of insight, of devotion, of sympathy — is sure to bring much away for his reader's delectation. Does not this account for the sense of intimacy which his reader has with the man, even before meeting him? — the feeling that if he ever does meet him, it will be as a friend, not as a stranger? And when one does meet him,

## AN APPRECIATION

and hears him speak, one almost invariably thinks: "He talks just as he writes." To read him 'after that is to hear the very tones of his voice.

We sometimes hear the expression, "English in shirt-sleeves," applied to objectionable English; but the phrase might be applied in a commendatory way to good English, — to the English of such a writer as Mr. Burroughs, — simple, forceful language, with homely, everyday expressions; English that shows the man to have been country-bred, albeit he has wandered from the home pastures to distant woods and pastures new, browsing in the fields of literature and philosophy, or wherever he has found pasturage to his taste. Or, to use a figure perhaps more in keeping with his main pursuits, he is one who has flocked with birds not of a like feather with those that shared with him the parent nest. Although his kin knew and cared little for the world's great books, he early learned to love them when he was roaming his native fields and absorbing unconsciously that from which he later reaped his harvest. It is to writers of *this* kind of "English in shirt-sleeves" that we return again and again. In them we see shirt-sleeves opposed to evening dress; naturalness, sturdiness, sun-tan, and open sky, opposed to the artificial, to tame-

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

ness, constriction, and characterless conformity to prescribed customs.

Do we not turn to writers of the first class with eagerness, slaking our thirst, refreshing our minds at perennial springs? How are we glad that they lead us into green pastures and beside still waters, away from the crowded haunts of the conventional, and the respectably commonplace society garb of speech! What matter if occasionally one even gives a wholesome shock by daring to come into the drawing-room of our minds in his shirt-sleeves, his hands showing the grime of the soil, and his frame the strength that comes from battling with wind and weather? It is the same craving which makes us say with Richard Hovey:—

“I am sick of four walls and a ceiling;  
I have need of the sky,  
I have business with the grass.”

But it will not do to carry this analogy too far in writing of Mr. Burroughs lest it be inferred that I regard the author's work as having in it something of the uncouth, or the ill-timed, or the uncultured. His writing is of the earth, but not of the earth earthy. He sees divine things underfoot as well as overhead. His page has the fertility of a well-cultivated pastoral region, the limpidness of a mountain brook, the music of our unstudied songsters, the elusive charm of the blue beyond the

## AN APPRECIATION

summer clouds; it has, at times, the ruggedness of a shelving rock, combined with the grace of its nodding columbines.

Mr. Burroughs has told us, in that June idyl of his, "Strawberries," that he was a famous berry-picker when a boy. It was with a peculiar pleasure that I wandered with him one midsummer day over the same meadows where he used to gather strawberries. My first introduction to him as a writer, many years before, had been in hearing this essay read. And since then never a year passes that I do not read it at least three times — once in winter just to bring June and summer near; once in spring when all outdoors gives promise of the fullness yet to be; and once in the radiant summer weather when daisies and clover and bobolinks and strawberries riot in one's blood, making one fairly mad to bury one's self in the June meadows and breathe the clover-scented air. And it always stands the test — the test of being read out in the daisy-flecked meadows with rollicking bobolinks overhead.

What quality is it, though, that so moves and stirs us when Mr. Burroughs recounts some of the simple happenings of his youth? What is it in his recitals that quickens our senses and perceptions and makes our own youth alive and real? It is

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

paradise regained — the paradise of one's lost youth. Let this author describe his boyhood pastures, going 'cross lots to school, or to his favorite spring, whatsoever it is — is it the path that he took to the little red schoolhouse in the Catskills? Is it the spring near his father's sugar bush that we see? No. One is a child again, and in a different part of the State, with tamer scenery, but scenery endeared by early associations. The meadow you see is the one that lies before the house where you were born; you read of the boy John Burroughs jumping trout streams on his way to school, but see yourself and your playmates scrambling up a canal bank, running along the towpath, careful to keep on the land side of the towline that stretches from mules to boat, lest you be swept into the green, uninviting waters of the Erie. On you run with slate and books; you smell the fresh wood as you go through the lumber yard. Or, read another of his boyish excursions, and you find yourself on that first spring outing to a distant, low-lying meadow after "cowslips"; another, and you are trudging along with your brother after the cows, stopping to nibble spearmint, or pick buttercups by the way. Prosaic recollections, compared to spring paths and trout brooks in the Catskill valleys, yet this is what our author's writings do — re-create for each of us our



## AN APPRECIATION

own youth, with our own childhood scenes and experiences, invested with a glamour for us, however prosy they seem to others; and why? Because, though nature's aspects vary, the human heart is much the same the world over, and the writer who faithfully adds to his descriptions of nature his own emotional experiences arouses answering responses in the soul of his reader.

Perhaps the poet in Mr. Burroughs is nowhere more plainly seen than in his descriptions of bird life, yet how accurately he gives their salient points; he represents the bird as an object in natural history, but ah! how much more he gives! Imagine our bird-lover describing a bird as Ellery Channing described one, as something with "a few feathers, a hole at one end and a point at the other, and a pair of wings"! We see the bird Mr. Burroughs sees; we hear the one he hears. Long before I had the memorable experience of standing with him on the banks of the Willowemoc and listening at twilight to the slow, divine chant of the hermit thrush, I had heard it in my dreams, because of that inimitable description of its song in "Wake-Robin." It does, indeed, seem to be "the voice of that calm, sweet solemnity one attains to in his best moments." As one listens to

## OUR FRIEND JOHN BURROUGHS

its strain in the hush of twilight, the pomp of cities and the pride of civilization of a truth seem trivial and cheap.

What a near, human interest our author makes us feel in the birds, how we watch their courtships, how we peer into their nests, and how lively is our solicitude for their helpless young swung in their "procreant cradles," beset on all sides by foes that fly and creep and glide! And not only does he make the bird a visible living creature; he makes it sing joyously to the ear, while all nature sings blithely to the eye. We see the bird, not as a mass of feathers with "upper parts bright blue, belly white, breast ruddy brown, mandibles and legs black," as the textbooks have it, but as a thing of life and beauty: "Yonder bluebird with the earth tinge on his breast and the sky tinge on his back, — did he come down out of heaven on that bright March morning when he told us so softly and plaintively that, if we pleased, spring had come?" Who is there in reading this matchless description of the bluebird that does not feel the retreat of winter, that does not feel his pulse quicken with the promise of approaching spring, that does not feel that the bird did, indeed, come down out of heaven, the heaven of hope and promise, even though the skies are still bleak, and the winds still cold? Who, indeed, except those

## AN APPRECIATION

prosaic beings who are blind and deaf to the most precious things in life?

“I heard a bluebird this morning!” one exclaimed exultantly, so stirred as to forget momentarily her hearer’s incapacity for enthusiasm. “Well, and did it sound any different from what it did last year, and the year before, and the year before that?” inquired in measured, world-wearied tones the dampener of ardors. No, my poor friend, it did not. And just because it sounded the same as it has in all the succeeding springs since life was young, it touched a chord in one’s heart that must be long since mute in your own, making you poor, indeed, if this dear familiar bird voice cannot set it vibrating once more.

THE END



## INDEX

(The abbreviation "B." as used in this index refers to the subject of this book.)

- ADAMANA. See Arizona.
- Addison, J., 149.
- Adirondacks, B.'s first trip to, 108.
- Akers, Elizabeth, "Florence Percy," 174.
- Alaska, B. in, 230; Muir glacier, 245; "Green Alaska," 238; Alaskan expedition, referred to, 230; alluded to, 22, 229; B.'s comments on his narrative of the trip, 143; the men he affiliated with, 139.
- Algebra, how B. earned his first, 58.
- Allen, E. M., verses to by B., 174-75.
- "All Souls," early *nom de plume* of B.'s, 151; quoted, 151-56.
- "All's Well with the World," B.'s optimism, 8-9.
- Amiel, 41.
- "Analogy," early essay of B.'s, 164; commented on by Wasson, 168-71.
- Anti-rent war, anecdote concerning B.'s father, 57; concerning neighbor, 94.
- "Apologie for Poetrie." See Sidney.
- Apple, B.'s comments on essay about, 15.
- "Appreciation, An," by author, 255-73; "obituary method of," 1.
- April, B. quoted, 256.
- "Arctic Explorations." See Kane.
- Arizona, 229, 230, 244; desert, 231, 232.
- Arnold, Matthew, 14, 146, 187.
- Ashland. See Hedding Literary Institute.
- "Atlantic Monthly," B.'s first appearance in, 2, 101, 128, 130, 162; B.'s fiftieth anniversary as contributor, 2; its early influence on B., 81, 128, 177; its refusal of early essay on "Analogy," later acceptance, 164; Wasson's opinion of it, 165; B.'s first bird article, 108, 173.
- Audubon, stimulated B. to study birds, 81, 107-08, 109.
- Aunts and uncles of B., paternal, 48; maternal, 50, 53-54, 65.
- Author's association with B., 4, 10, 29, 202; first meeting, 29-44; first introduction to his writings, 269; aiding him in typing and proof-reading, 221-22; travels with B., 227 *et seq.*; see also "Back to Pepecton."
- Autobiographical matter by B., shown in letters, 15, 16-18; account of ancestry, family life, and development, 46-147; concerning early writings, 148-49, 163, 177-78.
- Autobiography, Aldrich's comments on, 45.
- Avery, Chauncey, uncle of B., 49.
- Avery, Rachael, paternal grandmother of B., 47-49.
- "A Year in the Fields," anecdote concerning, 71.
- "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight," mentioned, 174.
- Bacon, 14, 127, 152, 166.

## INDEX

- Barrow, Dr. Isaac, mentioned, 166.
- Batavia Kill, 203.
- Beaverkill, 22.
- Bee-culture, B.'s love for, 112; brother's bees, 112; bumblebees, 80, 119, 120.
- Bee-hunting, B. quoted, 30, 31.
- Benton, Joel, quoted concerning "Waiting," 181-82; his Concordance of Emerson, 190.
- Bergson, Henri, ideas allied to in B.'s early essays, 163, 164; "Creative Evolution," 187, 189, 220.
- Berry-picking, 15, 115, 116, 269; mother's love of berry-picking, 65, 115, 116, 223.
- Biology, B.'s comments on study of, 81, 82.
- "Birch Browsings," 155.
- "Bird and Bough," 261.
- Birds, B.'s early interest in, vivid recollections, 118-19; country experiences, 107, 108; stimulation by Audubon, 81, 107-08; began writing about them, 108, 173.
- "Birds and Poets," 255.
- Birthplace of B. *See* Roxbury, and Old Home.
- Björnson, quoted, 8.
- Black Pond, 25.
- Bloodroot, B. quoted, 262.
- "Bloomfield Mirror," B.'s first appearance in print, 149-50; quotation, 150.
- Bluebirds, early essay of B.'s quoted, 157-58; later descriptions referred to, 159; quoted, 272.
- Blue grass region, 22.
- "Boarding round," 95.
- Boswell's Johnson. *See* Johnson.
- Brahms's Cradle Song, a favorite of B.'s, 201.
- Broomstick, Stevenson quoted, 141.
- Brothers and sisters of B., data concerning, 67-73; B. an "odd one" among them, 59, 69, 71-73, 80, 88, 109-13, 120-21, 210; their indifference to his writings, 50, 51, 59, 64, 68, 69, 70, 71, 110; family weaknesses and ineffectiveness, 66, 110; death of favorite sister, Abigail, 50-51; the one who best understood him, 51, 69-70; Brother Wilson, 215; *also see* Hiram and Eden Burroughs.
- Brown, Brownlee, 162, 163.
- Browne, Francis Fisher, editor of "The Dial," mentioned, 246; referred to, 242; alluded to, 221, 253.
- "Bunch of Herbs," 155.
- Burroughs, Amy Kelly, mother of B., born, 54; mentioned, 53, 56; courtship, 60, 203; married, 54, 60; described by son, 63-65; her arduous life, 61-62, 76; her intercessions for him, 58, 64; never read one of his books, 64; her berry-picking, 65, 115-16; son's fondness for her, 15, 64, 66, 67, 82; her death, 64, 116; the debt he owes her, 64, 65, 67, 115, 120.
- Burroughs, Chauncey, father of B., son's description of, 55-60; a farmer, 46; Celtic traits, 48, 66, 114, 115; first home after marriage, 54; easier life than mother, 61, 62; unfriendliness to B.'s educational aspirations, 58, 59, 64; never alluded to his literary work, 59, 60; physical make-up, 48, 65-66; indifference to nature, 56, 115; his religion, 55-56, 59; sympathy with anti-renters, 57; B.'s filial affection for, 59, 66, 67, 82, 115; inheritance from paternal side, 65, 66, 67, 114, 147; death, 64, 67.
- Burroughs, Eden, grandfather of B., 47; pursuits, characteristics,

## INDEX

- and death, 47-48, 114; his first house, 48, 54-55, 203.
- Burroughs, Eden, brother of B., 69.
- Burroughs, Ephraim, great grandfather of B., 47.
- Burroughs, George, the Reverend, early American ancestor of B., 46.
- Burroughs, Hiram, eldest brother of B., description of by B., 67, 121; his pursuits, 70, 110-12; life of the two brothers together at Slabsides, 71-72; death, 67, 70; anecdotes about him, 110-13. *See also* Brothers and sisters.
- Burroughs, John, early ancestor of B., 47.
- Burroughs, John, ancestor born in 1705, 47.
- Burroughs, Rev. John C., 46.
- BURROUGHS, JOHN, THE MAN:**  
*Birth*, 60, 69; fifth son and seventh child, 60; B.'s description of country about birth-place, 87-88; yeoman ancestry, 23, 24, 46, 51, 110, 145-46; B.'s account of ancestry and family life, 46-71, 145-46; B.'s account of childhood and youth, 73-109, 114-15; B.'s self-analysis, 43-44, 45-46, 48, 50, 66, 80, 96-97, 109-10, 112-47, 149.  
*Boyhood*, B.'s account of, 73-87, 116-25; early recollections, 205-06, 207, 212, 223; first day in school, 204; first journey from home, 204; early school days, 74, 120, 121, 204, 208, 215; West Settlement school, 204, 213, 214, 215, 270; love for fancy poultry, 112-13; love of bees, 112; early interest in nature, 80, 117, 118; first birds noticed and remembered, 118-19, 210; spring peepers, 80, 119; Bumble bees, 119-20; boyish periods of exaltation, 121-22; boyish explanation of origin of universe, 79-80; early books read, 102, 121; early occupations and pursuits, 211-12; work on farm, 74, 75, 85-87, 115, 116-17, 131; sugar-making, 58, 74, 85-87; first money earned, 58, 75, 112; hunting, 77-79; fear of ghosts, 208-09; youthful Sundays, 124, 125; trout-fishing, 14, 76, 124, 133, 215, 217-18; phrenologist's prediction, 123; the word "taste," 207-08; "antiquities," 208; roses of boyhood, 214.  
*Youth*, B.'s account, 88-109; early interest in books and education (new Academy), 212-13; the lure of Harpersfield Seminary, 89-90, 213; day dreams, 89-90, 123-24; aspirations, 213; first home-leaving, 90-94; first engagement at school-teaching, 92-95; homesickness, 94, 96-97; attends Hedding Literary Institute, 97-100, 222; attends Cooperstown Seminary, 104-05; other school-teaching, 103, at Buffalo Grove, Illinois, 107, and in New York and New Jersey schools, 107, 173; first visit to New York City, 100-02, 211; second-hand books purchased, 100-01, 211; recollections of youth, environment, etc., 82-84, 114, 117.  
*Early Manhood*, engagement and marriage, 103-04; early reading, 81, 105, 121, 126, 148, 211; philosophical writing, 107, 148; begins to study medicine, 107, 171, 173, 177; first attempts at writing, 96, 106, 107, 108, 117, 142, 148-64, 163, 172-73, 174-77; first interest in the birds, 118-19, 81, 107-09; dreams of wealth through patent buckle, 107; writes "Waiting" (*see* "Waiting"); first es-

## INDEX

say in "Atlantic" (see "Expression"); first appearance in print, 149-50, quotation, 150; first bird essay, 108, 173; first verses, 64, 174-76; clerkship and life in Washington, 173, 238; bank examiner, 23; first book published, "Walt Whitman as Poet and Person," 173; first nature book, "Wake Robin," 173; "Vine-Dresser of Esopus," alluded to, 23-24, 193.

*Personal appearance*, 29-30, 184.

*B.'s review of his life*, 131-39; a shorter survey, 17.

*Characteristics*, friendliness, 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 266; true heartedness, 3; joy in life, 4, 131, 137, 240, 251; serenity, 4, 221; see also "Waiting"; simplicity, 5, 8, 27, 227, 263; retiring habits, 5, 7, 26, 28, 139; genuineness, 6, 40; optimism, 9, 182-83; urbanity and tolerance, 5; humor, 5, 39, 40, 41, 202, 237; approachableness, 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 26, 28, 200; extreme sensitiveness, 7, 91, 114, 134, 208-09, 212, 213; likeness to FitzGerald, 5, 6, 7; hermit habits, 5, 26, 139, 241; tendency to sulk, 30, 48; "dreamy, shirking ways," 52, 110, 114; a loiterer, 7, 132, 250, 251; "yearning, brooding nature," 115; comradeship, 6, 8, 10, 11, 29, 44, 263; hospitality, 5, 10, 44, 77; Indian name, 5; in domestic capacity, 38-41, 72, 189, 191-93, 201-02, 222; idealism and romantic tendencies, 65, 264; inability to harbor resentment, 66; lacking in decision, 66, 110, 128, 134, 228; lacks heroic fibre, 7, 133, 134, 137-38; a lover of peace, 133, 134, 231; shuns argument, 231-32; aversion to speech-making, 240; "Felix," the fortunate, 18;

at home in the universe, 4-5, 17, 159-60, 161, 253; independent, not partisan, 134-35; nearness to the soil and to common things, 7, 19, 23-24, 116, 261, 264, 268; associated with all out of doors, 1, 4, 21-22; strong filial and fraternal feelings, 15, 50-51, 59, 64, 66, 67, 70, 82, 115, 133; love of home, 22, 28, 51, 55, 66-67, 70, 82, 114, 116, 124, 156-57, 198, 203; love of home scenes, 196, 230, 237-39; homesickness amid strange surroundings, 238-39; loath to leave home, 228; love of early friends, 239; dominated by the spell of the Past, 196-97, 224-26; Celtic traits, 48, 66, 114, 115; the "child in the heart," 8, 17, 198, 219, 220, 239-40; his secret of youth, 17; holiday spirit, 8, 133, 137; love of simple life, 5, 17, 19, 20, 27, 28, 33, 132, 135-36, 185-86, 200-01, 240; a hero-worshiper, 35; love of animals, 132; "Silly Sally," the cat, 34, 41; some of his indoor companions, 187; honorary degrees declined, 239.

*Religion*, reverence for the Cosmos, 4-5, 17, 42-43, 178; things he venerates, moral standards, 67, 134, 137, 138, 139; his "Outlook upon Life," 186; views on Immortality, 188-89; occasionally moralizes, 265-66.

*Journeyings*, 21-22; European trips, 22, 202-03, 238; Adirondacks, 108; Yellowstone, 22, 143; Alaska, 22, 139, 229, 238; Jamaica, 22, 238; Grand Cañon, 22, 227, 235-37, 244; Yosemite, 227, 247-49, 252, 253-54; Hawaii, 22, 227, 238, 239, 240, 245; keen interest in new territory, 229.

*Burroughs and Muir contrasted*,



## INDEX

231, 234, 235, 237-38, 241, 250-51.

*Birthdays*, celebrated by school-children, 16-17; seventy-second birthday, 245-46; birthday letters, 256, 257.

*Nicknames*, "John of Birds," 253; "John of Woods," 219; "Vine-Dresser of Esopus," 193; "Hermit of Slabsides," 26; "Sage of Slabsides," 184; "Oom John," 3; "St. John," 221; "Uncle John," 200; "Man-not-afraid-of-company," 5; "Laird of Woodchuck Lodge," 193; "Baba" (to his grandchildren), 194.

THE WRITER, his wide appeal, 1, 2-3, 7, 8, 9-10, 73, 210-11; appreciated while living, 1-2, 3 (*see also* "An Appreciation," 255-73); contemporary opinions — a critic in 1876, 2; Brander Matthews, 2; Roosevelt, 3; Whitman, 3, 255, 257, 260; N.Y. "Globe," 3; Western architect, 8-9; Kansas youth, 9; Minot Savage, 255; Wasson's opinion of his unusual intellectual gifts, 164-66, 168-71, 178-79; personal relation craved by readers, 1, 4, 5; man and his books closely related, 6, 8, 9, 15, 19, 115, 162, 266-67; body and mind closely related, 135-36; must be in good health, 135-36; an interpreter of nature, 2, 45, 66, 72, 115, 116, 159-60, 161-62; 221, 257-59, 261-63, 266, 269-71; insistence on truth about nature, 52, 134, 146, 150, 263-64; method of writing, 140-47; labors to overcome crudities, 106, 145-46, 153; must first experience things, 15, 142-43; writes because he loves to, 8, 140-42, 143, 250, 251; once imitated Johnson, 149; involuntary imitation of Emerson (*see*

Emerson); his earliest verses, 64, 174-76; for early writings (*see also* Early Manhood); growth in literary taste, 105-06; philosophical and speculative essays referred to, 238; poet and scientist combined, 271-72; gospel of his books, "Stay at home," 228, 22-23; his writings a foreign thing to his kin, 50, 51, 59, 60, 64, 68, 69, 70, 71, 267; his style, 2, 8, 19, 40, 149, 263, 267-69, 271; goes to the heart of things, 40, 200-01; B. as a critic, 12-13, 14-16, 49; his comments on style (*see* Style).

B. and the children, 2; letters to Fulton school-children, 14-16; to N.Y. school-children, 16-17; his correspondents, 2-3, 5-6, 10-13; strange requests from them, 11, 12, 13.

B. compared to Gilbert White, 19-21, 27, 257, 258-59; to Thoreau, 19-21, 26, 27, 28, 257, 259-60, 263; to Richard Jefferies, 257, 260; to "Michael Fairless," 260.

B. quoted, the mothering powers of the universe, 4; letters to school-children, 14-16, 16-17; concerning his own good fortune, 18; on the naming of Slabsides, 20; observations about familiar places, 22-23; on ploughing, 24; on living near a great river, 24; obey the call of one's own nature, 27; one's environment, 28; concerning correspondents, 29; mushrooms, 30; on his tendency to sulk, 30, 48; bee-hunting, 30-31; wild honey, 31; the building of Slabsides, 33-34; dislike for paint and polish, 33; life at Slabsides, 33-34, Silly Sally, 34; meeting with Emerson, 35; subsequent meetings, 35-36; Holmes and Whittier, 36; Emerson and

## INDEX

- Whitman, 36-37; Whitman, 37-38; Maeterlinck, 39; on the heart of things, 40; fireside talks, 34-43, 186-91; "Waiting" (see "Waiting"); autobiographical matter, 46-147; early writings quoted (*which see*); the permanence of youthful experiences, 117, 224; early verses, 174-76; "Waiting," 182-83; his imitation of Emerson, 163; invitation to Slabsides, 184; partridge, 185; region about Slabsides, 185; simple life, 186; concerning Emerson on immortality, 187; B. on immortality, 188; Whitman on same, 189; on his treacherous memory, 189-90; visiting grave of grandparents, 191; the baking of an onion, 192; the spell of the Past, 196-97, 225; "The Return," 197; song of vesper sparrow, 201; the look of the home hills, 203; on one's identification with his own landscape, 203; grandparents as pioneers, 203; learning his letters, 204; his first venture in the world, 204; on early recollections (*which see*); soil of native hills, 206; corn-shelling, 206-07; early school days, 207; first heard word "taste," and "antiquities," 207-08; flying grasshoppers, 211; autumn journeys with father to sell butter, 211-12; Roxbury Academy, 212; early fear of God, 213-14; pen-picture of self with boyhood roses, 214; on his inherited love for trout-fishing, 217; last fishing trip with grandfather, 218; coveting a schoolmate's slate pencil, 223; exasperation at John Muir, 224; joy in living at Woodchuck Lodge, 225-26; disinclination to travel, 228; Muir's loquacity and hectoring traits, 228-29, 237, 247; monotony of Kansas landscape, 230; preferring to see old friends to taking honorary degree, 239; domestic matters, 244; Muir's glacial hobby, 248; itch for geology, 248; Yosemite, 248, 254; Muir's note-taking, 250; April, 256; porcupine, 259; on the walker, 261; reporting nature, 261; closed gentian, 262; fringed polygala, 262; early everlasting, 262; pewee, 262; bloodroot, 262; pink lady-slipper, 262-63; red clover in England, 263; hawk pursued by lesser birds, 265-66; stone fence-making, 266; hermit thrush, 271; bluebird, 272.
- Burroughs, John, the younger, grandson of B., 194, 202.
- Burroughs, Julian, son of B., a Harvard graduate, 46; follows father's pursuits, 193; his family, 193, 194.
- Burroughs, Stephen, ancestor of B., 47.
- Burroughs, Stephen, ancestor of B., 47.
- Burroughs, Stephen, ancestor of B., 65.
- Burroughs, Ursula North, wife of B., 103, 104, 107, 193.
- Butter-making, early essay of B., quoted, 172, 173.
- California, described by B., 16-17; mentioned, 142, 243; desert, 239; southern C., 227.
- Camp Ahwahnee. *See* Yosemite.
- Camp Monax. *See* "Woodchuck Lodge."
- Carlyle, 127, 146, 187; "In the Carlyle Country," 22.
- Carman, Bliss, quoted, 256.
- Catskills, 6, 192, 224, 238, 261, 270; "Heart of Southern Catskills," 22; Old Home in Catskills (*see* Old Home); B.'s homesickness for, 196; return

## INDEX

- to, 198; peaks seen from near Old Home, 208.
- Channing, Ellery, quoted, 271.
- "Charlotte Temple," 102.
- Chaucer, 105.
- Civil War, 84, 95, 177.
- Clapp, Henry, 151.
- Cobb's second reader, 74; spelling book, 74.
- Colorado River, 237.
- "Complete Letter Writer," 95, 96.
- Cooperstown Seminary, attended by B., 104-05; revisited in 1902, 106-07.
- Correspondence, B. with school-children, 14-17; universality of letters to B., 10, 11; strange requests from correspondents, 11, 12, 13; London correspondent, 10; responses from readers, 2-3.
- "Cosmopolitan, The," 140.
- "Country Calendar, The," 11.
- Country life, best stimulates nature study, 80, 82, 108, 116, 117, 124.
- Cowley, 14.
- "Creative Evolution." *See* Bergson.
- Crimean War, subject of debate, 99.
- Cromwell, quoted, 264.
- "Culture, A Thought on," 154-55.
- Cypripedium acaule*, B. quoted, 262.
- Dana, Charles A., 37.
- Darwin, 187.
- Dayball's arithmetic, 74, 121.
- Deacon woods, 204, 210.
- Debates in school, 99.
- "Deep," early essay of B.'s, 153, 154.
- Delaware County, 91, 198, 199, 206, 216.
- Dellenbaugh, Frederick, 139.
- Dick, Thomas, a writer who stimulated B. in youth, 101, 105.
- "Divine Abyss." *See* Grand Cañon of Colorado.
- "Divine Soil, The," 155.
- East Branch of Delaware. *See* Pepacton.
- "Egotistical Chapter," mentioned, 107.
- El Capitan. *See* Yosemite.
- Eliot, George," quoted, 70.
- El Tovar. *See* Yosemite.
- Emerson, Charles, 166.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, mentioned, 14, 146, 173, 187; quoted concerning Thoreau, 27-28; B.'s first meeting with E., 35; his description of E.'s appearance, 35-36; subsequent meetings, 35-36; E.'s early influence on B., 81, 105, 126-28, 177; "Emersonian musk," 129, 130; involuntary imitation of E., 163-64; "Expression" first ascribed to E., 129, 162; Brownlee Brown involuntary imitator of E., 162-163; E. quoted concerning "Leaves of Grass," 37; quoted, 41; E. slow in publishing essays, 166; Concordance of Emerson, 190; E. on immortality, 187; "Worm striving to be man," 189-90; quoted, 203.
- England, "Mellow," 22, 155, 238; England's impression on B. quoted, 202-03.
- "Epicure, Fragments from the Table of an Intellectual," 151-58.
- Erasmus, 158.
- Esopus Creek, 49; Esopus Valley, 248.
- Essays, early writings of B. took that form, 148; early reading of essays, 105, 148-49; Brander Matthews on B. as an essayist, 2; essay-writing demands maturity, 166; other requisites, 167, 171-72. *See* Wasson.
- Everlasting, early, 262.

## INDEX

- "Expression," B.'s first essay in "Atlantic," 2, 128, 165; ascribed to Emerson, 129, 162; contains Bergsonian ideas, 163-64.
- "Fairless, Michael." *See* "Michael Fairless."
- Fiske, John, lecturing at Harvard on immortality, 187-88.
- FitzGerald, Edward, described by a contemporary, 5; likeness to B., 5, 6, 7; quoted, 7.
- "Flight of the Eagle," essay on Whitman, 155.
- "Fragments from the Table of an Intellectual Epicure," early essay of B.'s, 151.
- Franklin, Benjamin, 69.
- Freeman, quoted, 15-16.
- "From the Back Country," general title of B.'s early nature essays, 172.
- Gentian, closed, 262.
- Gilchrist, Anne, 41, 42.
- "Globe," N.Y., quoted, 3.
- Golden Poems. *See* Browne, Francis Fisher.
- "Gospel of Nature," 221.
- Gould, Jay, playmate of B., 60; anecdote and doggerel, 215, 216.
- Gould, John, 60.
- Grand Cañon of the Colorado, 22, 227, 244, 252; with Burroughs and Muir at Cañon, 235-37; first sight of spectacle, 235, 236; descent into Cañon, 236-37; B. writing on the Grand Cañon, 244; "Divine Abyss," 244.
- Grape-culture, an avocation of B.'s, 23.
- Gray's "Elements of Geology," 216.
- Greenleaf's Grammar, 121.
- Haleakala, 11.
- Half-Dome. *See* Yosemite.
- "Harper's Magazine," 99.
- Harpersfield Seminary, 89, 213.
- Harriman Alaskan Expedition. *See* Alaska.
- Harvard College, 46, 187.
- Hawaii, referred to, 22, 227, 238, 240; B. in Hawaii, 238, 239, 245.
- Hawk, pursued by lesser birds, 265, 266.
- Hay-barn study, 200.
- Hedding Literary Institute, 97, 222, 223.
- Hill, Adams Sherman. *See* Rhetoric.
- Himalayas, 11.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell, seventieth birthday celebration, 36; B.'s father's comments on it, 59; H.'s wit, 36.
- Homer, 13.
- Honolulu. *See* Hawaii.
- "Hours of Spring." *See* Jefferies.
- Hovey, Richard, quoted, 268.
- Hudson River, home of B., 19, 20, 24, 25, 225, 238; his comments on living by a great river, 24.
- Hull, Dr., mentioned, 90, 91-92; B. read medicine with him, 107; "Waiting" written in his office, 177.
- Hurst, Bishop, 98.
- Huxley, Thomas Henry, 187.
- Hylas, 80, 93, 119.
- Hymettus, Mount, a wild-honey haunt near Slabsides, 31.
- "Idler, The." *See* Johnson.
- "Idyl of the Honey Bee," mentioned, 71.
- Immortality, Emerson's essay, 187; Fiske's lecture, 188; Whitman quoted, 189; B.'s comments, 188-89.
- "Independent," the N.Y., 175.
- Indian name given to B., 5.
- "Indirections, On," 159-60.
- "Indoor Studies," 21.
- "Invitation, The," 118.
- Jamaica, 22, 238.
- Japan, 134.

## INDEX

- Jefferies, Richard, 257, 260.
- Johnson, Samuel, early influence on B., 101, 102, 105, 148, 149.
- Kane's "Arctic Explorations," 21.
- Kansas, 230.
- Kelly, Amy. *See* Burroughs, Amy Kelly.
- Kelly, Edmund, B.'s maternal grandfather; described by B., 51-53; a soldier, 51, 53, 113, 114; a dreamer, 65, 114; religion of the Kellys, 65, 113; quick-tempered, 66; Celtic descent, 65, 66, 114, 191; belief in spooks, 51; trout-fishing, 52, 113, 217-18; story of black snake, 52; death, 96, 191; B.'s visit to graves of grandparents, 191.
- Kelly, John, maternal cousin, 50.
- Kilauea, 238.
- "Knickerbocker Magazine," 164, 177.
- La Fayette, Marquis de, 51.
- Lady's-slipper. *See* *cyripedium*.
- Lamb, Charles, 149.
- "Leader, The," printed early articles of B.'s, 130, 172; quoted from, 157-62.
- "Leaf and Tendril," 155.
- "Leaves of Grass." *See* Whitman.
- Letters, from B. to school-children, 14-17; letters to B. referred to, 10-13; early letters of B., 96.
- "Life of the Bee." *See* Maeterlinck.
- Lincoln, Abraham, 35.
- "Literary Values," 149, 164.
- "Little Billee." *See* Thackeray.
- Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," 101, 102, 148, 149.
- "Locusts and Wild Honey," 155.
- "Long Road, The," 155, 221.
- "Long Woods," 211.
- "Loss and Gain," 175, 176.
- Lowell, James Russell, opinion concerning "Expression," 128, 129; rejected "Analogy," 164.
- Maeterlinck's "Life of the Bee," 39; "Silence," 39.
- "Man-not-afraid-of-company," Indian name given to B., 5.
- Martinez, California, home of John Muir, 227, 249.
- Matthews, Brander, quoted, 2.
- "May-Day." *See* Emerson.
- "Mellow England." *See* England.
- Merced River. *See* Yosemite.
- "Michael Fairless," 260.
- Milton, parsing "Paradise Lost," 97; B. shocked at celestial warfare, then skeptical, 98; M. quoted by John Muir at Grand Cañon, 236; mentioned, 166.
- Minot, Lavinia, 51, 53.
- Mission Inn. *See* Riverside, California.
- Mojave Desert, 227.
- Montaigne, 187.
- Montgomery Hollow Stream, 24, 52, 76, 217.
- Moore, Isabel, 7, 8.
- Mount Lowe, 245.
- Muir Glacier. *See* Muir.
- Muir, John, as traveling companion, 227, 234, 237; writing in New York, preparatory to African trip, 223-24; M. as raconteur, 228, 231, 250; "a born tease," 229, 230, 234, 235, 236, 237, 246-47, 248; with B. and M. on Desert, 230-35; M. discovered Petrified Forests in Arizona, 234-35; his disregard for food and sleep, 235; with M. and B. at Grand Cañon, 235-37, 252; in Yosemite, 247-49, 252, 253-54; M. the Wanderer, 237, 241, 250-51; "the Beloved Egotist," 253; "John of Mountains," 253; aversion to speech-making, 241; gregarious inclinations, 241; "Stickeen," 243;

## INDEX

- discoverer of Muir Glacier, 245; his glacial theory, 248, 250; indefatigability as student and note-taker, 249, 250; defender of forests, 249; the botanist, 249; generosity, 251-52; his favorite epithet, 242-43; M. and B. contrasted, 231, 234, 235, 237, 238, 241, 250-51; M. quoted, 233, 235, 236, 241, 242, 250, 252.
- "Murphy, the Indian Killer," 121.
- Mushrooms, 30.
- "My Brother's Farm," 64.
- Nature-fakers, 52, 134, 150, 194, 264, 265.
- Nature study in schools and colleges, 81, 82.
- Nature writing, earliest by B., 129, 130. *See* "From the Back Country"; *see also* 108, 173.
- Nevada Fall. *See* Yosemite.
- Neversink, 22.
- "New Ideas," early essay of B.'s, quoted, 157.
- New Zealand, 11.
- "Noon of Science," 221.
- North, Ursula. *See* Burroughs, Ursula North.
- Occultation of Venus, 100.
- Old Clump, 83, 124, 200, 201, 202.
- Old Home, birthplace of B., 60, 64, 71, 72, 202, 209, 218, 224; his fondness for it, 68, 70, 71, 82-83, 97, 198; B.'s homesickness for, 97, 196 (*see also* "The Return"); farm on which Woodchuck Lodge is located, 199; region about, 201; B.'s reminiscences, 83-84, 114-17, 123-25; corn-shelling, 206-07; walks about, 208-09.
- Old School Baptist, 48, 55, 63, 67.
- Olney's geography, 74.
- "On Indirections," 159, 160.
- "Oom John," 3.
- "Outlook upon Life, An," 186.
- "Overland Monthly," 249.
- "Pageant of Summer." *See* Jefferies.
- Pang Yang, 185.
- "Paradise Lost." *See* Milton.
- Pasadena, California, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245.
- Pepacton, stream of B.'s boyhood, 22, 198, 202, 221; "Pepacton," the book, 198.
- Personality, mystery of, 70-72.
- Petrified Forests, Arizona, 227, 231-35, 242, 252; description of forests, 232-34; discovered by Muir, 234-35; with B. and Muir, 232-35.
- Pewee, 262.
- "Phantoms Behind Us, The," 209.
- "Philomath," 150.
- Pietro, Cartaino Sciarrino, sculptor, 3, 200.
- Pigeons, wild, 77, 78, 256.
- "Pinch of Salt, A," 155.
- Poetry *versus* science, 156, 157.
- "Poet's Epitaph." *See* Wordsworth.
- Polygala, fringed, 262.
- Poole's Index, 129.
- Pope, 105, 126.
- "Popple Town Hill," 185.
- Porcupine, 259, 265.
- Potomac, 22.
- Potosi, 159.
- Poughkeepsie, 20, 57, 184.
- Pupils, early, of B., 94-95.
- "Rainbow, The." *See* Wordsworth.
- "Rainbow, The," essay by B., 222.
- "Rambler, The." *See* Johnson.
- Raphael, 166.
- Red Kill, 24, 53, 90.
- "Return, The," 197.
- "Return of the Birds, The," 108.
- Rhetoric, B.'s views on its value,

## INDEX

- 14-16, 98; Hill's Rhetoric quotes from "Expression," 129.
- Riverby, home of B. at West Park, N.Y., mentioned, 23, 34, 198; referred to, 184, 192, 193; alluded to, 225; described, 193; vineyards, 193.
- Riverside, [California, 239, 240.
- "Road-Mender, The." See "Michael Fairless."
- "Robbers' Roost," 232.
- "Roof-Tree," 32.
- Roosevelt, Theodore, dedicated book to B., 3; quoted, 3; how he folds his hands, 13; moments of silence, 13; alluded to, 22; referred to, 143; in Africa, 242; Muir's comments on R., 242; his nickname for him, 242, 243.
- Roxbury, N.Y., birthplace of B. and of his father, 47, 198; mentioned, 73, 150, 202, 204, 212; B.'s description of surrounding country, 88, 202-03, 206; its first academy, 212-13.
- "Rural Divinity, Our," 155.
- Sainte-Beuve, 187.
- Saint-Pierre's "Studies of Nature," 101, 126, 148-49.
- San Bernardino, California, 239.
- Sanborn, Frank B., 173.
- San Francisco, California, 245, 246.
- San Joaquin Valley, 223.
- Santa Fé route, 229, 246.
- Sap-bush, description by B., 85-87, 218; early sugar-making, 58, 74-75, 114.
- "Saturday Press," 130, 151-55, 174.
- Savage, Minot J., 255.
- Schlegel's "Philosophy of History," 211.
- School days, early, 74; at Hedding Literary Institute, 97-100, 222; schoolmates, 98-99; anecdotes, 99; at Cooperstown Seminary, 104, 105.
- Schopenhauer, 41.
- Schubert's Serenade, 201.
- Science *versus* poetry, 156, 157.
- Scudder, Horace E., 164.
- Scudder, Warren, 94.
- Selborne. See White, Gilbert.
- Sentinel Rock. See Yosemite.
- Sequoia, 243.
- Shakespeare, 14, 126, 127.
- Sheep-washing, 212.
- Sherman, Ellen Burns, 1.
- Sidney, Sir Philip, quoted, 262.
- Sierra, 242, 249.
- Sigillaria. See Petrified Forests.
- "Signs of the Times," 56, 68.
- "Silly Sally," a cat at Slabsides, 34, 41.
- Skylarks in Hawaii, 238.
- Slabsides, B.'s retreat near West Park, N.Y., 5; the goal of his readers, 6, 9, 12, 26, 27; its far-reaching influence, 9-10; Slabsides hospitality, 10, 38-41, 44, 77, 185, 189-90; the retreat described, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 31-34; alluded to, 240; B.'s life at Slabsides, 28, 33-34; the building of S., 33-34; the original Slabsides, 65; B. and his brother Hiram at S., 71-72, 112; region around S. described by Whitman, 25; by author, 31-32, 184-85, 187, 190-91; "A Winter Day at S.," 184-94; "Sage of Slabsides," 184; fireside talks with B., 34-39, 41-43, 186-87, 183-89, 191; interior of S., 190; mentioned, 193, 198; rosebush, 214.
- "Snow Walkers, The," 155.
- Socrates, quoted, 26.
- "Some of the Ways of Power," 161.
- "Songs of Three Centuries." See Whittier.
- Sophocles, 221.
- Sparrow, vesper, its song, 201.
- "Specimen Days," quoted from, 25.

## INDEX

- Spenser, 105.  
 Spiritualism, 150.  
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 136, 141.  
 "Stickeen." *See* Muir.  
 "St. John's Bread," 11.  
 Stone-fence making, 266.  
 Strawberry, essay on, 15, 269; quest of, 116, 223, 269.  
 "Street of Lost Time," 195, 196.  
 Study at Riverby, mentioned, 24, 187, 193; Hay-barn, study at Woodchuck Lodge, 200.  
 Style, B.'s comments on, 14-16, 106, 130, 144-45, 152-54.  
 Sugar-making. *See* Sap-bush.  
 "Summit of the Years," 221, 222.  
 Sundays, best days for nature communion, 124, 125.  
 Swallow, 156.
- Tennyson, Alfred, 126.  
 Thackeray, William Makepeace, "Little Billee" mentioned, 220.  
 Thayer, W. R., quoted, 69.  
 "Theory and Practice," 157.  
 Thomson, James, 126.  
 Thoreau, Henry David, compared with other literary naturalists, 19-22, 26, 27, 138, 257, 259, 260, 263; quoted, 28; early influenced B., 81.  
 "Thought on Culture, A," 153, 154.  
 Thrush, hermit, 200, 202, 271, 272.  
 "Time and Change," Brander Matthews's criticism, 2; Western architect's comments, 9; B.'s description of his native hills, 206. *See also*, 88.  
 Titles, B.'s felicity concerning, 155.  
 Tolstoy, 39, 200.  
 Tongore, 92, 93, 94, 95, 103.  
 "Treasures of the Humble." *See* Maeterlinck.  
 Treasury Department, 23, 109.  
 Trout-fishing, favorite pastime of B., 14, 76, 124, 215, 217-18; better than rhetoric, 14; pastime of grandfather, 52, 113, 217-18; B. a trout-fisherman instead of social reformer, 133.  
 Tuolumne meadows. *See* Muir.
- Universe as mother of us all, 4, 5.  
 "Vagaries vs. Spiritualism," 150.  
 Valley Forge, 51, 53.  
 Vassar College, address to rhetoric class, 15; students at Slab-sides, 26; broken bread-box, 41.  
 Vernal Falls. *See* Yosemite.  
 "Vine-Dresser of Esopus," alluded to, 23, 24, 193.  
 Vineyards at Riverby, 23, 24.  
 Volcano, Hawaiian, 238.
- "Waiting," a universal solace, 5, 12, 43, 177; alluded to, 13, 192; conditions under which it was written, 42, 177; B.'s comments on it, 42-43, 177-78; further comments on it, 180-81; Joel Benton's comments, 181-82; Wasson's opinion, 177, 178-79; a discarded stanza, 180; a stanza sometimes substituted, by the author, 181; a spurious stanza, 181; the poem itself, 182-83; referred to, 189, 197.  
 "Wake Robin," mentioned, 9, 155; B.'s first nature book, 173; Emerson's comments on, 35-36; referred to, 118, 159, 271.  
 Walden Pond. *See* Thoreau.  
 "Walt Whitman as Poet and Person." *See* Whitman.  
 Warbler, hooded, B.'s first warbler, 210-11; B.'s first identification of, 108.  
 "Washington, Life of," 121.  
 Washington, D.C., B.'s life in, 23, 108-09, 173; association with Whitman, 37-38, 103.  
 Wasson, David A., mentioned, 164, 177; letters to B. quoted,



## INDEX

- 165-72; concerning "Waiting," 177, 178-79; Wasson's own publications, 166-67; advice concerning essay-writing, 166, 167, 169, 170, 171-72; W.'s opinion of B.'s intellectual gifts, 165-66, 168, 169, 170, 171, 178-79.
- West Park, 23, 24, 29, 112, 184, 198.
- West Point, B.'s first meeting with Emerson described, 35; library used by B. in ornithological studies, 107; B. teaching near West Point, on the Hudson, 107.
- Whately's Logic, 98.
- "What Life Means to Me," 140.
- Whipple, Edwin Percy, 105.
- "White Day and a Red Fox, A," 69.
- White, Gilbert, compared with Thoreau and B., 19, 20, 21, 27, 257, 258-59; quoted, 259; "Natural History of Selborne," 21.
- Whitman, Walt, comments on B.'s true heartedness, 3; W.'s influence on a certain correspondent, 9; his early influence on B., 35, 126; W. mentioned, 187, 220; quoted, 189, 209; "Leaves of Grass," Emerson's indorsement, 36-37; quoted as to "push of reading," 130; B.'s description of W., 37-38; "Walt Whitman as Poet and Person," 173; "Whitman, A Study," written at Slabsides, 71, 173; B.'s love for W., 72, 103; W. as championed by B., 134, 173; "Flight of the Eagle," 155; W.'s description of Black Pond Falls, 25; W. and Anne Gilchrist, 41-42; W. quoted about B., 255, 257; contrasts B. and Thoreau, 260.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf, his manner, 36; his "Songs of Three Centuries" gave publicity to "Waiting," 177.
- Willowemoc, 271.
- "Winter Sunshine," 50, 155.
- "Wisdom and Destiny." *See* Maeterlinck.
- Woodehuck Lodge, the Catskill summer home of B., at Roxbury, N.Y., 69, 198; description of it, 199-200; life there, *see* "Back to Pepacton," 199-202, 218-20, 221-26.
- Woodehucks, 84, 219, 225; "John of Woodehucks," 219.
- Wordsworth, William, early influenced B., 81, 126; W. quoted, 32, 220; mentioned, 187; alluded to, 206; "The Rainbow," 222; B.'s comments on W., 220.
- "World Growth," 157.
- "Year in the Fields, A," 71.
- Yellowstone National Park, B.'s trip there with Roosevelt, 22; delay in writing up the trip, 143.
- Yeoman ancestry. *See* BURGESS, JOHN.
- Yosemite Valley, 227, 243, 250, 252; with B. and Muir in, 247-49, 252; Yosemite Falls, 248-49, 253; Muir's notes on, 250; "The Spell of Yosemite," B.'s essay, 22.
- Young's "Night Thoughts," 105, 126.

**The Riverside Press**  
**CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS**  
**U . S . A**









DEC 4 - 1925

